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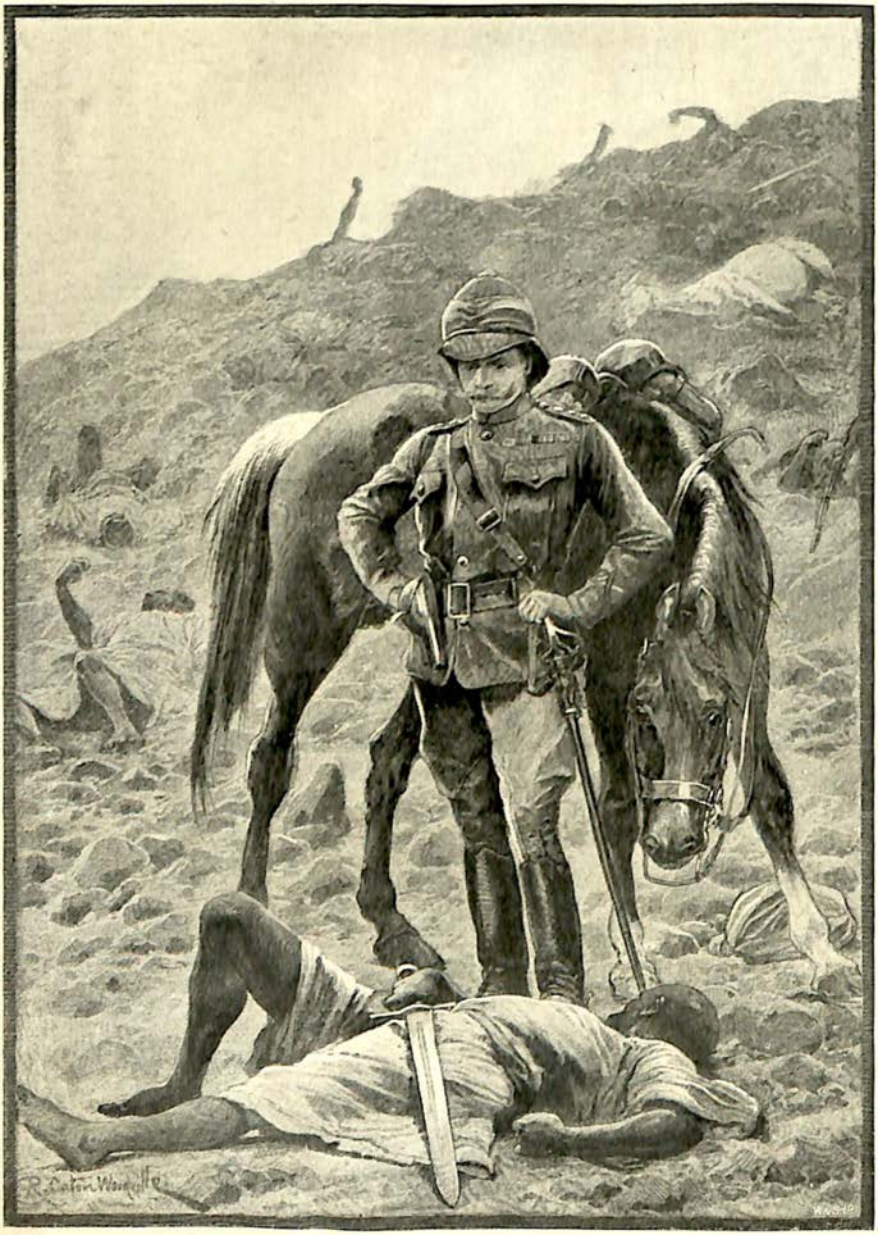
LETTERS FROM THE SUDAN



SLATIN PASHA FINDING AMONG THE SLAIN THE BODY OF THE EMIR HAMMUDA.

LETTERS FROM THE SUDAN

ROYAL ASIA

BY

THE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF "THE TIMES"
(E. F. KNIGHT)

REPRINTED FROM "THE TIMES" OF APRIL TO OCTOBER, 1896

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND PLANS

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

SLATIN PASHA FINDING AMONG THE SLAIN THE BODY OF THE EMIR HAMUDA ... ... *Frontispiece*

THE 9TH SUDANESE REGIMENT MARCHING TO SHELLAL TO EMBARK FOR THE FRONT ... ... *to face p.* 9

THE ROAD THROUGH THE DESERT TO MURAT WELLS, SEEN FROM THE HILLS ABOVE KOROSKO ... ... *to face p.* 56

CONVOYS PASSING THROUGH THE SONKI DEFILE ON THE WAY TO AKASHEH ... ... *to face p.* 94

VIEW FROM THE FORT OF AKASHEH ... ... ,, 104

THE SECOND BRIGADE AT THE BATTLE OF FERKEH ... ,, 119

THE FIRST BRIGADE ATTACKING THE JAALIN CAMP AT THE BATTLE OF FERKEH ... ... *to face p.* 125

THE EGYPTIAN CAMEL CORPS ... ... ,, 160

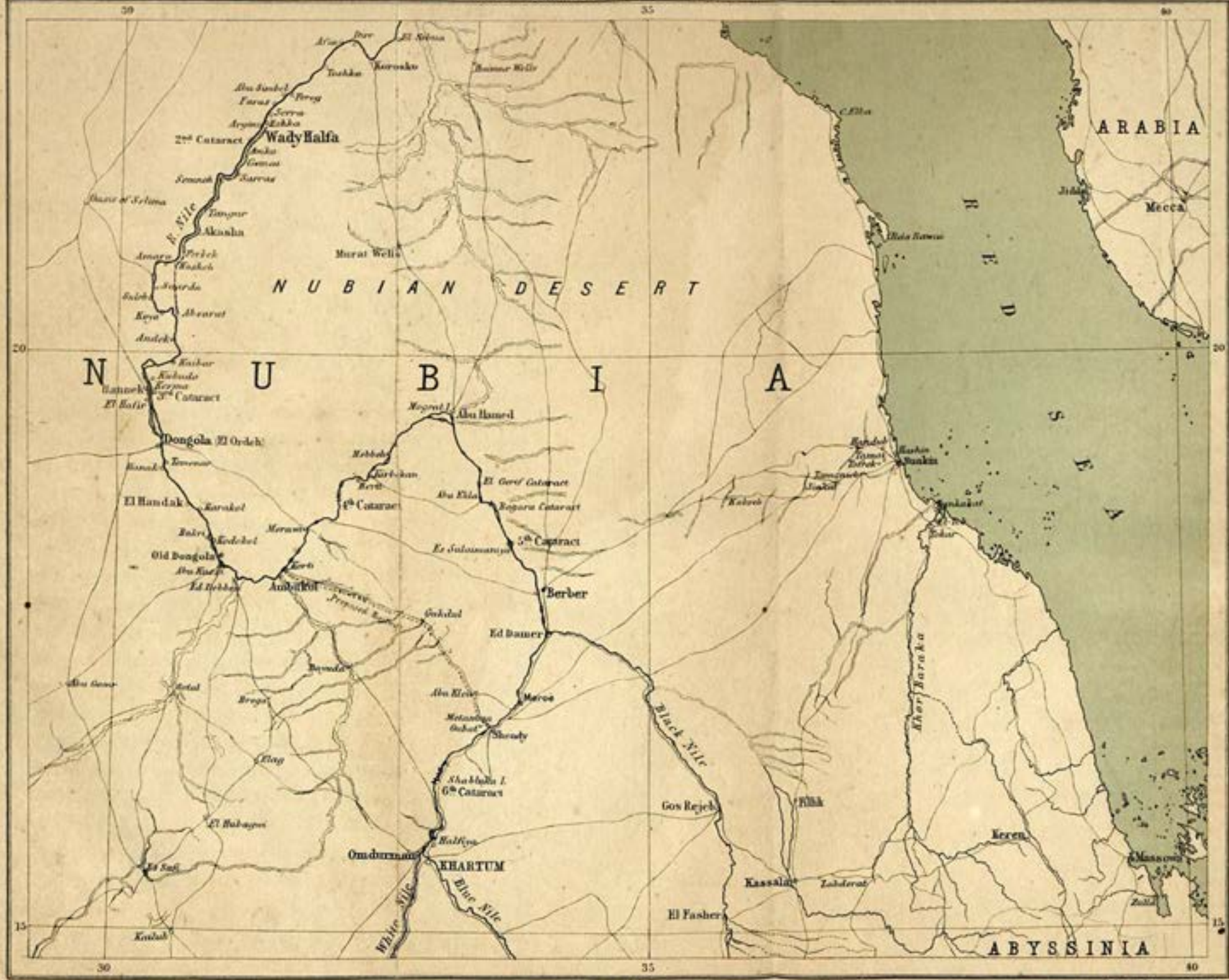
SONKI BY MOONLIGHT: INSIDE THE ZARIBA ... ... ,, 192

HAULING A GUNBOAT UP THE SECOND CATARACT ... ,, 242

THE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE LEAVING FEREIG AT DAYBREAK ON THE WAY TO HAFIR ... ... *to face p.* 275

THE GUNBOATS BOMBARDING DONGOLA ... ... ,, 296

GENERAL MAP OF NUBIA



EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN

I

ASSUAN, *March* 28.

A TEN days' journey has brought me from London to Assuan, on the Nubian frontier, the southernmost town of Egypt proper, which is situated just below the first cataract of the Nile at a distance of 730 miles from the mouth of the river. I left London within a few hours of its being first known that an expedition to Dongola was to be undertaken, and, as I travelled through Italy by the Brindisi express, I found that the news had not yet been published in that country. But when I landed at Port Said I saw all around me signs of hurried military preparations, and the expedition was being eagerly discussed by the people, all of whom took it for granted that nothing less than the complete overthrow of the Khalifa's tyrannical rule and the reconquest of the Sudan had been determined on by the British and Egyptian Governments. Egyptian troops were being hurried up to the front by every train. At Port Said even the gunners of the

saluting battery had been sent off, and the Sudanese blacks, who were employed in coaling vessels in the port, were all impressed for military service. The train and steamer by which I travelled from the sea to Assuan were crowded with these Sudanese conscripts, whose wives, standing on the railway platforms and river bank, bade them farewell with dismal wailings, impassioned wringing of hands, and what sounded like terrible curses heaped on the heads of those who were tearing their lords away from them. But the men themselves looked cheery enough, and both fellahin and black troops have set out for the front in excellent spirits. Throughout all ranks in the Egyptian army a soldierly enthusiasm prevails at the prospect of the war. In Cairo all the Egyptian officers have eagerly volunteered for service in the Sudan, with one exception, I am told, a subaltern, who, on hearing of the proposed expedition, resigned his commission, a course of action which he must now regret, for he has been reduced to the ranks, and his epaulets were torn from his shoulders in the presence of the troops. Unwilling to fight as an officer he will now be compelled to shoulder a rifle and go to the front as a private soldier.

The distance from Cairo to Girgeh, the present terminus of the railway, is 505 kilomètres, and the journey is accomplished in thirteen hours. The railway has recently been extended to Balianeh, about ten miles beyond Girgeh, but this section has not yet been opened to the public and is at present used

only for Government purposes. At Girgeh, therefore, I had to leave the train and take passage on one of Cook's comfortable stern-wheeler steamers, which run between that place and the first cataract. At Balianeh we embarked the first British troops to set out for Wady Halfa, about forty men of the Royal Engineers, all keen to try conclusions with the Dervishes, and some of whom were old soldiers who had taken part in the last Sudan campaign.

The extension of the railway from Balianeh to Assuan is now being pushed on as rapidly as possible. The embankments are almost completed, the bridge across the Nile at Edfu is in course of construction, and it is confidently expected by the engineers that this very important railway, affording direct communication between the coast and Nubia, will be open in about twelve months. From Assuan the railway will be continued to Korosko—engineers are now surveying this portion of the line—and from Korosko it will probably be carried across the Nubian desert, by the wells of Murat, to Abu Hamed, but before this can be done the power of Mahdism must of course have been broken.

After a three days' voyage up the now shrunken channel of the Nile, between the green belts of irrigated fields and palm groves, the steamer reached Assuan, and here the correspondent of another newspaper and myself have been compelled to remain until the arrival of the Sirdar and his staff, as it is considered inexpedient that any correspondence should be sent from the front until a military

censorship has been organized, and even at Assuan we can despatch no telegrams until they have been submitted to the commandant. This precaution has been rightly taken, for the Khalifa undoubtedly has his agents in all parts of Egypt and is kept very well informed as to all that is taking place. At Assuan itself the leading Arab merchant, whose income amounts to £4000 a year, has just been found guilty, after a trial by court-martial, of having supplied the Dervishes with saltpetre and lead. He has been heavily fined and has been condemned to ten years' imprisonment in chains. I heard the governor read his sentence out to this old man, outside the court-house, in the presence of the assembled townspeople. The Egyptian troops that garrisoned Assuan had been despatched to Wady Halfa before my arrival, and two companies alone are left here. Within a month the whole expeditionary force will be at Wady Halfa and at the front. When it is remembered that the order to undertake this expedition was altogether unexpected in Egypt and took every one by surprise, that transport is at present insufficient, and that the majority of the troops have to be brought up to Wady Halfa from stations 700 or 800 miles distant, it will be recognized that the preparations for this advance have been carried out with a remarkable celerity which speaks very well for the organization of the Egyptian army.

The sudden calls of this expedition have already raised prices to war rates in Assuan. The Govern-

ment is purchasing all the camels, and now no camels can be sold or hired out to private individuals without the permission of the commandant. Donkeys are far dearer than heretofore, horses are not to be got, and forage (*dhurra* and chopped straw) is very costly. The Government is not paying the outrageous prices which prevailed during the former war; but the inhabitants are making large profits, and, eager as they are above all things to acquire money, they are highly pleased that this expedition has been undertaken. It seems, however, that they are not altogether sanguine as to the success of our arms. I at first had great difficulty in engaging a body servant and camel-drivers. One after the other came to me anxious to obtain employment, and each, when he heard what was to be my destination, promptly refused to accompany me, stating, as his reason, that he did not wish to have his head cut off. It is evident that the Dervishes still inspire great terror in the frontier people and are regarded by many as being invincible. The merchants in Assuan itself have up till now not felt altogether secure, though the Khalifa's posts are far distant. There is good reason to believe that the Dervishes meditated a raid across the desert on this city a short time since; but the rapid advance of the Egyptian troops and the fact—no doubt known to the Khalifa—that thousands of men are now on their way up the river has for the time apparently checked the activity which the Mahdists were beginning to display. The last we have heard of

them is that a small reconnaissance appeared before Akasheh on March 23, but at once retired when it was perceived that the Egyptians were holding that place in some force.

Assuan would have supplied the Arab raiders with a rich booty. Situated as it is at the southern extremity of Egypt proper, it has always been a great emporium for the trade between Egypt and the interior. A short railway connects Assuan with Shellal, by which goods are carried past the cataract to be re-shipped on the river boats. There is a large bazaar here and there are many rich merchants in the place. Within the last few years Assuan has greatly improved. A well-constructed stone embankment extends along the Nile; while handsome public buildings and hotels face the river, concealing the squalid houses of the Arab town behind. Before the Mahdi rebellion closed the Sudan, the gum, ivory, ostrich feathers, and other produce of the Sudan and Central Africa passed through Assuan on its way to Cairo, and the imports from the north were also considerable. The merchants here fully realize that the destruction of Mahdism will at once re-open the old trade, and that Assuan is likely to shortly become a very wealthy and busy place. What prosperity it now enjoys is chiefly due to the winter immigration of English and American tourists.

On March 26, Sir Herbert Kitchener, Major Wingate, and Slatin Pasha arrived here on their way to Wady Halfa, and correspondents have

received permission to proceed to the front. We propose to leave by the first post-boat, which will probably be crowded with the British and Egyptian troops now on their way up the river. All camels and horses will be marched up the river bank.

II

KOROSKO, *April* 10.

WHEN the Sirdar and his staff reached Assuan, permission was given to newspaper correspondents to proceed to the front. By that time five of us had collected at Assuan, and as we were informed that it would, in all likelihood, be impossible for us to purchase camels or donkeys in Wady Halfa, we made all our preparations before setting out. Every effort is being made to push troops and supplies up to the front as rapidly as possible; but though steamers, towing laden barges, ascend the river daily, and numbers of sailing *nuggurs* scud up against the stream whenever the strong north wind blows, their decks piled high with military stores, the means of transport are still insufficient; it has been found impossible to carry by river the camels needed for the expedition, and these, consequently, are being marched up the right bank. The military authorities are lending every assistance in their power to correspondents, and had barges been available we should have been permitted to send up our animals by water. But this was not feasible, and we have, therefore, been compelled to march

THE 9TH SOUDANESE REGIMENT MARCHING TO SHELLAL TO EMBARK FOR THE FRONT

our servants, horses, camels, and donkeys up the bank. The distance from Assuan to Wady Halfa is 210 miles by river; but the land route is considerably longer, and, as practically no forage or other supplies are procurable on this road, the camels had to be laden with all that was necessary for the journey in addition to our baggage. We might have despatched our caravan in charge of our servants, and ourselves taken passage on one of the frequent steamers; but as there was no possibility of an advance from Wady Halfa for some weeks to come, we thought it best to accompany our belongings.

Each day while we were in Assuan the steamers arrived and disembarked the Egyptian and Sudanese troops which are to take part in the expedition —a visible sign to the citizens that the constant menace of the Dervish raids under which they have so long lived is likely to be removed at last. But that which reassured the people most, and led them to consider it quite possible that the British Government is on this occasion determined to carry its undertaking through and will not withdraw, was the arrival on March 29 of the 1st battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment, upwards of 1000 strong with details, under Colonel Beale. On disembarking below Assuan the men were marched, with band playing, through the town, along the quay which forms the principal street, and thence by road, past the cataract, to Shellal, six miles distant, where they re-embarked on the steamers which were to

transport them to Wady Halfa. The populace and the Bisharin Arabs who had come in from the desert crowded the quay to see the regiment pass. It was an impressive sight, and was of deep significance to all present, for they remembered that upwards of a decade has passed since British troops last marched through Assuan, and on that occasion their faces were turned to the north.

The Ababdeh and Bisharin tribes occupy the greater portion of the Nubian desert between the Nile and the Red Sea. Formerly neutral or disloyal, they now appear to have thrown in their lot with the Egyptian Government, and have no fear of the Khalifa's vengeance. They have for some time been made responsible for the protection of this portion of the frontier, and guard the long eastern flank, being armed and subsidized by the Government. They also supply useful information as to the movements of the Khalifa's troops and all that is going on in the Sudan. This expedition is very acceptable to these desert tribes, who are now bringing in their camels to Assuan and other military stations to sell them to the Government at a high rate. At Assuan I met the most important of all the Ababdeh sheikhs, Bishir, once more than suspected of double-dealing, and some of whose relations are in the Khalifa's service. He has been placed in command of the various sections of the tribe, and the defence of all this portion of the frontier to beyond the wells of Murat has been entrusted to him. He is in all probability shrewd

enough to realize that it will be to his interest to be loyal, and the consequences of any treachery on his part were clearly explained to him in Assuan. Bishir was good enough to send to the five war correspondents a man of his tribe to act as our guide during our march up the river bank along the western edge of the Ababdeh country.

We completed our preparations at Shellal, encamping opposite the island of Philæ, with its twin temples, and set out from that place on the evening of April 2. The distance from Assuan to Korosko, the first military station on our road, is little over 100 miles as the crow flies; but the track is very circuitous, often leaving the river bank to wind inland for miles across dreary rocky wastes, so that, though we travelled about nine hours each day, we did not reach Korosko till April 9. We found the riverain population throughout this journey very well-disposed and willing to sell us such few supplies as they could spare from their scanty stock. The expedition is especially welcome to the cultivators of the Nile valley south of Assuan, for it will bring them immunity from Dervish raids, and they feel that for the future they will be able always to reap what they have sown. The Egyptian Government, moreover, pays for all forage and other supplies requisitioned by the troops, so that the advance on Dongola signifies the distribution of considerable sums of money along the entire line of communication. I was astonished to find that so many of these peasants spoke a little English; this was not

the case, I am told, ten years ago, and is, of course, the result of our occupation. A man who employed the English tongue alone would find it far easier to travel up the Nile valley from the sea to Wady Halfa than to undertake a journey in most parts of British India.

During our journey the temperature rose daily to about 112° in the shade. It is the season of the Khamsin, so that by day the fiery desert wind generally blew strong, while frequent sandstorms darkened the sky and obscured the sun. For the most part of the way we followed the river bank, riding along the thin broken green line of vegetation that for hundreds of miles traverses the world's greatest deserts,—here, in Nubia, a belt of cultivation laboriously irrigated by multitudes of groaning water-wheels worked by oxen, a belt so narrow that one can walk across its broadest part in a few minutes, and leap over the corn-fields, which, though stretching miles along the bank, are often but a few feet in width. In places, where the shore is steep and rocky, the desert descends to the very water's edge, and the poisonous Dead Sea fruit is the only plant that can take root in the shifting sands. It was a comfortable journey, despite the heat and glare, for, though we occasionally left the river (where it formed a great loop or where cliffs made it impossible to follow the bank), we always returned to the Nile at night to encamp in the pleasant palm groves which are found outside each of the numerous small villages.

On April 8 we reached the village of Sialeh, where we found four railway engineers encamped, among them M. Nicour, the chief engineer of the Egyptian railways. These gentlemen were surveying the country to discover the most favourable line for the railway to Korosko. A few miles below Korosko cliffs fall into the river, and the camel track for ten miles crosses a crumpled-up wilderness of rocks offering great difficulties to railway construction. This section will be very expensive, as tunnels and deep cuttings will be needed. M. Nicour told me that the railway ought to be completed to Wady Halfa, or across the Nubian desert, to Abu Hamed within two years, and that, were the necessary funds forthcoming, the work could even be pushed through in a year. He considers that European labour, Piedmontese in preference to any other, will have to be employed on the Korosko section. From M. Nicour we also learnt that the Dervishes were not far off, and that a party of them now occupy the well of Kulaib, twenty-five miles from Korosko, and are supposed to be meditating a raid on the Nile villages in order to obtain grain and other supplies. Another party had cut the telegraph wire between the wells of Murat and Korosko. On April 8 we encamped outside the large village of Seboa, in front of the ancient temple and the two sphinxes with which visitors to this portion of the Nile are familiar.

On April 9 we set out at daybreak and reached Korosko, after a ten hours' march, during which our

camels did not halt. We crossed the rocky hills described by M. Nicour, and were able to appreciate the great difficulties the railway engineers will here encounter. Korosko is a small village, but is a place of great strategical importance, for it is from here that the caravan road crosses the desert to Abu Hamed, by way of the wells of Murat, a seven days' journey, a route to the Sudan quite 250 miles shorter than that afforded by the Nile. The Egyptian Government consequently maintains a considerable garrison at Korosko; at present it consists of 600 men of the 8th Regiment, as smart-looking, well-set-up fellows as one would wish to see. The barracks are excellent. The commandant, Youseff Bey. Kiloussi, is a fine-looking old Turkish soldier who fought through the Russo-Turkish war, and who, like so many of his countrymen, prefers to serve regenerated Egypt to remaining in his own land under the rule of the present Sultan. There are no British officers in Korosko, but the commandant has done all in his power to assist us and has placed rooms in the officers' quarters at our disposal.

As we have been somewhat longer on the road than we anticipated, and to march to Wady Halfa with our laden camels would occupy six days more, we have altered our plans, and shall embark on the first steamer (which is expected at any moment), while our animals will follow us along the bank. There is always a bare chance that the Dervishes will precipitate matters, and the latest news from

the front, which the commandant has just communicated to me, points this way. The Dervishes are being reinforced at Suarda, about fifty miles above Akasheh, and it is to be hoped that it is their intention to give us battle there, instead of retiring up the Nile, when we should have to fight with a much-weakened force.

III

WADY HALFA, *April* 16.

As I have explained in my last letter, four other correspondents and myself, having ridden from Assuan to Korosko, decided to send on our horses and camels by road from that place and to take passage on the first passing steamer, so as to reach Wady Halfa without delay. On April 10, the day after our arrival at Korosko, we learnt that five Government steamers laden with army rations had left Assuan for the south; in the evening the first of these, a stern-wheeler towing three deeply-loaded *nuggurs*, came in sight, and was signalled to stop by our friend the commandant in order that we might board her.

We steamed up the river for two nights and a day and reached Wady Halfa on the morning of April 12. The north wind blew strong during the voyage, so that we were outstripped by some of the many sailing *nuggurs*, laden with munitions of war and sleepers for the railway, which drove rapidly through the opposing current, each under her two great lateen sails, bellying out, trimmed one on either side, goose-winged. There appears to be now

no lack of vessels for transport up the river so far as Wady Halfa, and the base can be supplied without delay. It was daylight when we passed the most memorable landmarks of this portion of the Nile—the village and battle-field of Toski and the line of march of the gallant Nejumi still strewn with the bleached bones of his fanatical followers; and, farther up, the marvellous rock temples of Abu Simbel carved out of the river cliff, where the colossal stately figures with impassive faces look out upon the Nile. The country was of the same character as that we had traversed on our ride from Korosko; on either side of us, as we ascended the river, stretched the thin green line of palms and various crops, irrigated by water-wheels, backed by the sand-hills, the bare brown rocks, and the fantastic peaks of the desert.

Those among us who passed through Wady Halfa during the last campaign, on revisiting it now, express their astonishment at the great changes that have taken place within the last few years. The presence of energetic British officers here, as in many other waste places of the earth where we have the outposts of our Empire, has introduced civilization and prosperity; there is but little of the slovenliness of the East apparent at this station; everything is well ordered, and Wady Halfa, which a decade back was a congregation of squalid mud huts, is now a pleasant place to look upon. We disembarked in front of the military lines, and the authorities placed at our disposal some of the

houses which have been built for officers' quarters. The Egyptian Government has constructed extensive barracks at Wady Halfa capable of accommodating quite 4000 men. These buildings are comfortable, wholesome, and well ventilated, and at present the 1st battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment as well as the Egyptian and Sudanese troops are quartered in them without undue crowding. The whole station has a smart, bright, and cleanly appearance, in great contrast, no doubt, to what it was in the old days before our occupation, when the lazy, careless methods of the East prevailed in the Egyptian service. A pleasant and characteristic indication of British influence is seen in the gardens which surround the officers' quarters, where, from the irrigated desert sand, spring and blossom luxuriantly the roses, sunflowers, and other flowers of our own country.

About a mile below the lines of Wady Halfa is situated on the river bank the new town of Tewfikiyeh, the aspect of which also clearly betrays the presence of the reforming European. On the same site a few years ago stood the village of Dabroso, the bazaar supplying the Wady Halfa garrison, which was raided by the Dervishes in 1888, on which occasion many of the inhabitants lost their lives. That straggling village of mud huts has now been replaced by a well-laid-out, cleanly little town, surrounded by a wall, inhabited principally by Greek and native merchants. Tewfikiyeh contains a good bazaar, numerous European stores, and even

very fair restaurants and *cafés*. The English have here built a handsome little mosque, whose minaret is visible from a great distance as one approaches the town by river. Under the benevolent despotism of military law it is a thriving, orderly place, and the inhabitants, keen traders to a man, are of course delighted that the Government has undertaken an expedition which must bring them so much profit. But Tewfikiyeh has now attained the climax of its prosperity, and will, in all probability, shortly sink into insignificance again, for when the frontier has been advanced to Dongola it will be no longer necessary to maintain a large garrison at Wady Halfa.

There was but little news to be gathered at Wady Halfa when I arrived. The date at which the expeditionary force will advance is altogether uncertain, and it is not expedient that too much should be said yet as to the plan of campaign, for the Khalifa's agents quickly convey to him all the intelligence they can acquire. On the other hand, our intelligence department is as rapidly informed of the Khalifa's doings and the movements of his troops. We hear that 10,000 men are pushing on from Dongola towards Suarda, and that nearly 3000 men now occupy the latter place. The Dervishes have advanced their outposts to Kosheh, which is nearly twenty miles from Akasheh. Our scouts and small parties of Dervishes mounted on camels frequently encounter each other in the intervening country and occasionally exchange shots.

It is certain from communications that have been held with the inhabitants of the province of Dongola that these unfortunate people, who have for so long suffered under the cruel oppression of the Khalifa, are eagerly looking forward to the re-occupation of their country by the Egyptians, and are prepared to welcome their deliverers. With the exception of the men of his own tribe, the Baggara, whom alone the Khalifa favours at the expense of all others, the populations of the regions over which his tyrannical rule extends cordially detest him and are longing for his overthrow.

But, though weary of this insupportable yoke, these men dare not for the present rise against Abdullah or rally round us, fearing as they do for the lives of their wives and children, who remain at his mercy, hostages for the loyalty of his unwilling followers. These wretched men, as has happened before, will probably be thrust in advance of the Khalifa's true adherents, to fight against us under compulsion; and it is to be feared that our men will sometimes, at the commencement of an action, have to open fire on these would-be friendlies instead of our real foe. Not until we have entered the lost province, gained some signal victory, and given proof that we have no intention of drawing back, are these people likely to desert their tyrant and throw in their lot with us; but it is expected that then they will turn against him in vast numbers and fall upon his beaten and retreating fanatics, in which case the decaying power of Mahdism will probably

at once come toppling down like a house of cards. The disaffected inhabitants of Dongola are likely to behave much as did the people of Tokar when we re-occupied that district in 1891. The local Arabs, who had been cruelly oppressed by Osman Digna, were discontented with Mahdism and availed themselves of the first safe opportunity of deserting to us. Major Wingate, in his *Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan*, describes how, after we had defeated Osman Digna in the action at Afafit, crowds of the inhabitants of the large village of Afafit poured out to meet the troops, declared themselves friendlies, and expressed delight at being at last delivered from the tyranny of Mahdism. So soon as they saw that Osman and his followers were in full retreat, they joyfully cast off their Mahdist uniforms and at once resumed their ordinary peaceful avocations. Not only are the people who have been compelled to embrace Mahdism under the Khalifa's reign of terror awaiting our successful advance to join us, but many sheikhs who a decade since were zealous Mahdists at heart have now openly declared for the Egyptian Government, and round Suakin, for example, men who in 1884 fought against us at El Teb and Tamai, are now keen to overthrow their oppressor Osman and are lending valuable assistance to the Government cause. In that district the influential sheikh Omar Tito is displaying great activity on our behalf; and on either side of this portion of the Nile valley the desert tribes are volunteering their services and are

being organized into irregular levies, which are most useful for scouting purposes.

For the present the efforts of the military authorities are chiefly directed to securing the long line of communication, to vigorously pushing on the railway beyond Sarras, and to organizing the transport. That so much has been effected within the last three weeks reflects very great credit on the Egyptian service as controlled by British officers. It is, indeed, an extraordinary feat, at this short notice, to have carried through such extensive preparations for an expedition into difficult deserts so far from the base, regions which practically supply nothing, so that even the forage for the baggage animals has to be brought from great distances. There has been comparatively little difficulty in transporting troops and supplies as far as Wady Halfa and the present base Sarras; for the organization is excellent, and as I have already explained, a large number of steamers and sailing *nuggurs* are available on the river below Wady Halfa; last week as many as six laden steamers arrived here on one day. Occasional blocks, however, have been unavoidable at Assuan, where all stores have to be disembarked for carriage by land to beyond the cataract. The 4000 transport camels which will accompany the expeditionary force have been purchased and are now on their way up the river bank, but their pack saddles are in course of construction in the citadel at Cairo, and until these arrive no advance in force can be

undertaken. The railway from Wady Halfa, passing the second cataract, now extends to a point about three miles beyond Sarras, and will, it is hoped, be completed to Akasheh within three months.

It is unlikely that the Dervishes will attempt to harass our line of communication to the north of Wady Halfa; but no precaution has been omitted to make the line of communication to the south of Wady Halfa, as far as our furthest post, Akasheh, as secure as possible, for on several occasions small bodies of the enemy have been observed in the neighbourhood of the river between these points, and it is suspected that it is their intention to cut up our convoys whenever they can find an opportunity of doing so. The peculiar character of the country lends itself to this form of attack; the road, following the right bank of the Nile, traverses a wild, rocky region known as the Batan el Hajar, or "belly of stones," where the ground is cumbered with huge boulders and the range of vision is generally circumscribed, so that it would not be difficult for bodies of Dervishes to avoid our posts and reach the Nile unseen by following the numerous defiles, known only to the Arabs, which pierce the rugged hills.

The following measures have been taken to protect this vulnerable section of our present line of communication. On the road itself we have several posts. Of Egyptian and black troops there are now two battalions at Sarras (supplying Semneh), one battalion at Wady Atira, one at

Ambigol, one at Tanjur, and three at Akasheh. These stations supply the other posts on the road and also Ambigol Wells and the other various outposts to the east of the road, which are distributed along the embankment of the old railway. In addition to the infantry seven squadrons of Egyptian cavalry and 600 men of the camel corps constantly patrol the country between this and Akasheh. Still further eastward, beyond the railway embankment, in some cases far out in the desert, are the posts of the Arab friendlies of the Bisharin and Ababdeh tribes, while another large levy of Arabs of the Kababish tribe, whose country is in the neighbourhood of Dongola, patrol the whole western bank of the Nile. The Maxim guns are now at Akasheh and Tanjur. The transport of material from Sarras to Akasheh is at present chiefly conducted by water. The Nile here forms a series of rapids and cataracts, which necessitate portages at Semneh, Ambigol, and Tanjur. We have no steamers above the second cataract; native sailing craft—*nuggurs* and *gayassas*—are therefore employed to transport the supplies from rapid to rapid, while the carriage at the portages is effected by donkeys. The Nile is now almost at its lowest; the first rise, from the Blue Nile, occurs in the middle of June, but the river will not be high enough until about the end of July to permit of steamers crossing the second cataract; it then generally remains navigable for two months. As soon as the Nile has risen sufficiently a number of

steamers will be placed upon the river above Sarras, among others three new gunboats, the finest that have ever been seen on this portion of the Nile, armed with 12-pounder guns, Maxims and howitzers. The Mahdists still have one gunboat on the river; but it is in so dilapidated a condition that they will probably abandon it, and we are not likely to have a naval engagement on the Nile.

In every department the preparations for the coming campaign are being thoroughly organized. The medical arrangements appear to be admirable. The capacious building that was of old, before the Dervishes destroyed the line, the Wady Halfa railway station, has been converted into a military hospital. Branch hospitals have been established at Sarras, Ambigol, and Akasheh. Ambulance boats are being got ready for the transport down the river of the sick and wounded; camels will also be employed for this purpose, each camel carrying two men, slung one on either side in cots—a far more comfortable method of conveyance for sick men than one would imagine it to be. At present the health of the troops is excellent, as it should be in this magnificent climate; and happily the Egyptian Government sways the land and Egyptian law prevails here, so that it is impossible for well-meaning people in England to interfere with the very necessary regulations for the prevention of contagious diseases which are in force in Egyptian military stations. Were these precautions neglected appalling results would soon follow in these Nubian posts.

Wady Halfa, at this season of the year, appears to be one of the windiest and dustiest places on earth. · Since I have been here a strong wind, often freshening to a gale, has been ever blowing up the river. Clouds of dust drive across the desert, and sometimes the atmosphere, charged with minute particles of sand, presents the appearance of a grey fog; and then, as one looks down the broad river, whose discoloured water breaks in choppy waves beneath the gale that opposes its current, and whose low shores loom indistinct in the sand haze, one can almost imagine oneself at the estuary of one of the English east coast rivers on a stormy November afternoon. The wind here, moreover, has not the fiery breath of the Khamsin we encountered during our march to Korosko. The temperature for the last few days has rarely risen above 84° Fahrenheit in the shade, and in the early morning it is quite cold. For the present correspondents are not permitted to proceed south of Sarras; our horses and camels have this morning arrived by road from Korosko, so that we have the necessary transport to push on to the front as soon as we are allowed to do so.

IV

WADY HALFA, *April* 23.

ON Saturday I visited the camp at Sarras, beyond which, for the present, correspondents are not permitted to proceed. The train, loaded with military stores and protected by a guard of fellahin soldiers, left Wady Halfa at eight in the morning, and reached Sarras, thirty-four miles distant, in two hours. After traversing the flat sandy desert for a few miles beyond Wady Halfa the railway approaches the river and skirts the so-called second cataract of the Nile, where the river, at this season, dividing into many sinuous channels of rippling water, flows for about nine miles across a weird-looking waste of black, glistening, coal-like rocks, with here and there a scanty vegetation forming belts of brighter colour in the dry gullies left by the subsiding stream. Where the channels broaden many fantastically-shaped rocks rise as islands above the rapids, and all the many dangers that render the navigation so difficult at high Nile are laid bare. The scenery of this gloomy wilderness, spread out under the cloudless sky, is exceedingly picturesque and has a fascination of its own.

At Sarras a large fort, which was constructed about two years ago, crowns a rocky hill near the Nile bank. On the sandy plain below the hill is the extensive camp surrounded by a wall, where at the time of my visit the 2nd Egyptian battalion and details from other battalions to the number of about 1000 more men were quartered in the serried lines of tents. Beyond this, again, was the smaller camp of two troops of Egyptian cavalry. Wire entanglements at the foot of the hill defend the approaches to the fort. At Sarras, now, more than at any other post, one realizes that one is in a country at the brink of war. There is here a perpetual bustle of military preparation, hurried yet orderly. On the desert, by the railway line, are piled up the sacks of forage, the ammunition, and supplies of every description which are being pushed up to the front as rapidly as possible on camels or on the small boats which ply between the frequent portages. The transport arrangements are still inadequate, but the 4000 camels that have been purchased in the north are now arriving; each steamer brings up the camel packs that are being constructed in the Cairo citadel, and as I write this six steamers towing barges full of camels are approaching Wady Halfa. An escort of about 200 men—relieved at the principal posts on the way—guards each convoy that proceeds to Akasheh by road. The last convoy consisted of 700 camels and several hundreds of mules and donkeys. It is extraordinary that the Dervishes have not yet attempted to fall upon the

line of communication and carry off some of these rich prizes.

From Sarras the railway, avoiding the bends of the Nile and the rugged tract of the "Belly of Rocks," crosses the desert to rejoin the river at Akasheh. I found that the line had been completed to a point six miles beyond Sarras, and it is hoped that the work will shortly progress at the rate of nearly a mile a day. A railway battalion composed of conscripts is engaged on the construction, the working parties being guarded by the 7th Egyptian battalion. The old railway formation is in good condition, so that there remains little to be done beyond laying sleepers and metals. Fortunately the Dervishes have not entirely destroyed the old line. They have burnt as firewood a great number of the sleepers, and in places have removed the rails and employed them as enclosures for their praying grounds; but where the line crosses the desert, at a distance from the sites of Dervish camps, considerable sections of it have been left undisturbed. To the south of Ambigol Wells, for example, the railway has been found intact for a distance of nine miles, and can be made ready for traffic by merely removing the sand that has drifted over it. The telegraph was completed to Akasheh on the 20th, a remarkably rapid piece of work.

All the Egyptians one meets are now rejoicing at the victory of their troops in the east, and the overthrow of the Khalifa is anticipated with delight by soldiers and civilians. The coming campaign is

undoubtedly popular throughout the country, as is noted with chagrin by the French agitators in Cairo. The merchants of the towns, the cultivators of the Nile valley, the Beduin of the desert all hope that the long-deferred vengeance is at last to fall on the cruel oppressor of the Sudan, and the numerous Sudanese and natives of Khartum who have taken refuge in the north to escape the tyrant, are more especially exultant, and look forward to seeing once again the homes from which they have so long been exiled. We gather from the newspapers which reach us here that many of the people in England who rightly felt such deep sympathy for the persecuted Armenians are opposed to the Dongola expedition, being of opinion that no good can come of it. A visit to this country would, I think, soon convince any unprejudiced person of the righteousness of this undertaking. The unfortunate inhabitants of the Sudan groan under an oppression as cruel as that of the Turk; one-half the inhabitants have been destroyed by wholesale slaughter and by famine, numbers of them having been despoiled of all and put to death with torture because they were loyal to the Egyptian Government and trusted the English. It is surely inconsistent to lavish so much sympathy on the Armenian Christians while remaining callous to the sufferings of these enslaved populations, sufferings for which we are so largely responsible. That all the people subject to the Khalifa, with the exception of the formidable savages of his own Baggara tribe, are anxious to cast off the yoke

of their oppressor is proved by all the intelligence received from the enemy's country. The important information communicated on Saturday last by the Ababdeh chieftain Abd-el-Azim,—which I have already telegraphed—is regarded here as very significative. Abd-el-Azim, one of the loyal sheikhs subsidized by the Egyptian Government, whose men have been supplied with Remington rifles, set out with 200 of his followers from Murat Wells on April 10, with the object of making a demonstration in the south and ascertaining the strength of the enemy in that direction. He struck the Nile near the island of Sheri, about forty miles below Abu Hamed, and thence followed the river bank for about eighty miles to the neighbourhood of Hannek. He thus passed through the districts of Monassir and Dar Shaigai. He called meetings of the inhabitants and announced to them that it was the intention of the Egyptian Government to re-occupy the lost province. Everywhere the people rejoiced to hear this glad news, but, having so long lived under the Khalifa's reign of terror, they will not dare, for the present, to lend any open assistance to their deliverers. They informed Abd-el-Azim that the Khalifa was making vigorous preparations for war at Dongola and that many men had recently been forcibly carried away from these districts to serve in his army. Messengers have also arrived from Bishir Bey, who has been patrolling with his followers north of Ongat; he states that all the Bisharin Arabs are rapidly organizing their defence and will oppose the Der-

vishes; this will render an attack on our line of communication a perilous undertaking for the enemy. The latest news received from Omdurman, to the effect that there has been a desperate fight between the Arabs and blacks of the Khalifa's own body-guard, points to grave dissensions in the enemy's camp; but, as I have pointed out before, the people of the Sudan, though disaffected with the Baggara rule, are likely to fight against us under compulsion until we have gained some signal victory. To under-estimate the Khalifa's power would be to provoke disaster.

Living, as I am here, hard by the lines of the native troops, I have been able to observe how things are conducted in an Egyptian camp, and, like every one who has had such an opportunity, I have been led to form a high opinion of the excellent training and *morale* of these men. The British officers serving in the Egyptian army, of whom there are now about eighty-five, are for the most part young men. They have been carefully selected, and are smart, clever, keen soldiers—the right men, in short, for the difficult and delicate work entrusted to them. Our officers, out of what certainly appeared the most unpromising material, have organized a model little army. They have to a high degree displayed that capacity of the British officer, so conspicuous on our Indian frontiers, for bringing out all the good qualities that may exist in a native soldiery; they have won the confidence, the respect, and the affection of their men, and have inspired the native

officers with some of their own spirit and energy. They have, in short, effected an extraordinary transformation in a long corrupt service—a great work of which Englishmen should be proud, and which, while exciting their jealousy, has gained the admiration of foreign observers.

The Anglophobe French Press in Cairo and elsewhere still takes delight in criticizing, with much acrimony and perversion of facts, the British reorganization of the Egyptian army. It is frequently urged, with an unscrupulous unfairness, that, in order to maintain there an efficient native army for our own purposes, we support a system of conscription that inflicts a great strain on the country's resources and is an intolerable hardship to the inhabitants. Now, in the first place, in no European country does the burden of conscription fall so lightly on a people as it does in Egypt. To supply this army, which forms so very small a percentage of the population, not 2000 recruits are needed annually. It is only since our interposition that the troops are well treated and are content. As a matter of fact, it was in Mohammed Ali's time, when French influence prevailed in Egypt and when French instructors reorganized the Egyptian army on a French model, that a merciless system of impressment prevailed to maintain an army ten times as large as the existing one. It was then that on one occasion 70,000 men were torn from their homes in the far south and were marched to Upper Egypt with so cruel a disregard for all their wants that the

greater number perished on the way. Later on, in the years preceding 1882, when German and American officers trained the army, the system of conscription was nearly as oppressive—a state of things for which those officers were not responsible, as they were not allowed to have any real power and their recommendations were neglected.

In those days military service was so loathed and feared by the unfortunate fellahin that a large number of young men used to mutilate themselves in order to escape the conscription. To such an extent was this done that Abbas Pasha, in order to put a stop to the practice, formed two battalions of self-mutilated men, one battalion consisting of one-eyed men, and the other of men who had cut off the forefingers of their right hands, whom he trained to pull the triggers of their rifles with their left hands. Such self-mutilations now very rarely occur. The native officers also have good reason to be pleased with the reforms we have introduced into the Egyptian service. Formerly all the officers were Turks. But under Said Pasha this was changed, and Egyptians could rise to the rank of captain; under Ismail Pasha to the rank of colonel; and now Egyptian officers are in every respect on a complete equality with the Turks. In the black battalions officers frequently rise from the ranks; but since Arabi's revolt this is not the case in the Egyptian battalions, the officers of which all pass through the military schools.

Egyptians are liable to conscription at the age of

nineteen, but are not called up for service until they attain the age of twenty-three. They serve six years with the colours and are then drafted into the police, in which they serve for five years. On leaving the police they pass into the reserve, where they remain for another four years, but are seldom called out. This system has been modified of late. As it was found that the men who had just completed their first period of service were always far in excess of those needed for the police of the country, it was decided to form of these a first army reserve, and the surplus men are now drafted into the newly-raised 15th and 16th reserve battalions; while for the four years of their third and final period of service the men belong to what has now become the second reserve. Of the sixteen battalions, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th are officered by Englishmen, the Egyptian officers in these being below the rank of bimbashi—the lowest rank taken by an English officer on joining the Egyptian service; the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th are officered by Egyptians only; the 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, and 14th are the Sudanese battalions, having English colonels and majors; the 15th and 16th reserve battalions, like the first four battalions, are officered by English and Egyptians.

At all hours of the day I see the Egyptian troops in their hundreds bathing in the Nile beneath my quarters, and they certainly appear to the eye to be of as fine material as any soldiery in the world—tall, brawny, athletic fellows such as our recruiting

sergeants but rarely have the pleasure of enlisting. The Egyptian army being so small, it has been found possible to select the men far more carefully than can be the case in any other country where conscription prevails. These men are the pick of their race, and for every one taken as physically fit many are rejected. The fellah soldier has wonderful endurance; he can undertake long marches, supports extreme privations with stoical patience, and seems even to enjoy the arduous fatigue duties in which he is now constantly engaged in Wady Halfa. It is wonderful to observe how rapidly and with what cheery energy these wiry fellows unload the vessels that arrive here with military supplies, and with what springy step, showing no sign of weariness, they tramp across the sands, under the hot sun, shouldering the heavy sacks of forage, the cases of rifles and ammunition, and the cumbersome railway material. Cleanly in person, smart in appearance, submissive to authority, quick at learning their drill, sober and cheerful, the fellahin have many of the qualities that go to the making of an excellent soldier; but all who know them would hesitate to say that they possessed any true military instinct. Coming of a peasant race that has been oppressed and enslaved from time immemorial, the fellah is naturally devoid of military enthusiasm; he possesses passive courage, but has never had any relish for a soldier's career, and his highest ambition is to be left alone to live the peaceful life of a cultivator of the soil. As I have already explained, his former

intense loathing of military service has disappeared. Well treated as he is now, receiving good pay and excellent rations—rations which have been pronounced by the European medical authorities consulted in the matter to be the most nutritious and in every way the most suitable served out to any troops in the world—the Egyptian soldier so soon as he joins the ranks becomes apparently quite contented with his lot and is one of the cheeriest fellows possible. The fellahin troops are even beginning to develop an *esprit de corps*, in some battalions more especially. They have proved within the last few years that they can fight well; they are cool and steady under fire; but when it comes to meeting a Dervish charge and engaging in a hand-to-hand conflict with cold steel they cannot give so good an account of themselves as do the Sudanese who compose the black regiments.

These black troops have few qualities in common with their fellahin comrades. Coming of a race of hunters and warriors, they are full of the military instincts which have yet to be aroused in the Egyptians and entertain a strong *esprit de corps*. They possess a high courage, and it is found difficult to keep them in hand in the excitement of battle, as their one aim then is to at once get to close quarters with the enemy with cold steel. For this reason more British officers are needed for a Sudanese than for an Egyptian battalion. On the other hand, the Sudanese are less intelligent than the Egyptians; they are somewhat clumsy and are slower at learn-

ing their drill; they have not such fine physique; they cannot endure fatigue so well and are very subject to pneumonia; but their eyesight is stronger than that of the fellahin and their shooting is much better. The Sudanese soldiers are cheery, good-natured fellows, and become very attached to their British officers, who for their part entertain a strong affection for their men and look very carefully to their comfort. The blacks do not, like the Egyptians, serve for a stated period, but pass the greater portion of their lives in the ranks, and are only discharged when they become too decrepit for service. Their battalion is the only home they know; a large proportion of them are permitted to marry; and wherever a black battalion is stationed, there, too, is the *haremutt* set apart for the soldiers' families of light-hearted coal-black women and children. A married soldier draws a daily allowance of one piastre and a half for his wife; but *dhurra* and other provisions are now so expensive at Wady Halfa, where to keep a camel costs almost as much as would support an English artisan's family, that rations are also being served out to the soldiers' wives. The black troops are certainly as well cared for as any soldiery in the world, and when they have to leave their battalions as old men, various posts are found for them or they receive grants of land; there is a little colony of these retired veterans on the left bank of the Nile opposite Wady Halfa, and there is a large settlement of them on the Natron lakes, where their

children find employment in the carbonate of soda works.

While I have been waiting here for permission to proceed to Akasheh, all the troops that will compose the expeditionary force, with the exception of a few details, have arrived at Wady Halfa or have passed through to the southern posts, as smart and business-like-looking a force as one would wish to see—ten battalions of infantry, each battalion about 850 strong; seven squadrons of cavalry, with some ninety sabres in each; 600 men of the camel corps; the Maxim battery; two field batteries of six-centimètre Krupp guns; garrison artillery, now at Sarras and Akasheh; and, lastly, the Arab irregulars of the Ababdeh, Bisharin, and Kababish tribes, who patrol the desert on either side of the Nile. Inclusive of those on special service, about 120 British officers will lead this fine force; a number of English non-commissioned officers also, armourers and others serving in the Egyptian army, will accompany the expedition; while some thirty men of the Connaught Rangers, lent by the army of occupation, are attached to the Maxim battery. The troops, therefore, are now on the frontier, and the transport arrangements alone remain to be completed. This will be done in about three weeks, and then we shall know what is to be done next, for at present, doubtless for very good reasons, the plans of the Government and of the Sirdar are not divulged. The Egyptian troops are all armed with the Martini-Henry rifle, the Arab levies with Remingtons.

Many officers who understand the conditions of Sudan warfare trust that, if any British troops take part in a campaign against the Khalifa later on, they will not be supplied with Lee-Metford rifles. The charge of a fanatical Dervish is not easily stopped, and though riddled with these small-gauge bullets he may still get home to kill his man. The Lebel rifle, which is of about the same bore as the Lee-Metford, generally inflicted wounds, as I recently observed in Madagascar, which did not interfere much with the movements of the agile Hovas. The bullets, provided they did not touch a vital part, did not stop them in the least—from running away, of course, for those were men who never came on.

The three gunboats now building in England will be completed in time to ascend the Nile above the second cataract this summer. Each vessel will draw two and a half feet, will steam sixteen knots, and eighteen knots if necessary for a short time, and will probably carry two 12-pounder and four 6-pounder quick-firing Hotchkiss guns, a 15-pounder howitzer for shelling and burning the enemy's villages, and Maxim guns stationed in a high turret so as to command the summit of the river bank. Each vessel, moreover, will be able to accommodate a whole battalion of troops.

V

MURAT WELLS, *May* 6.

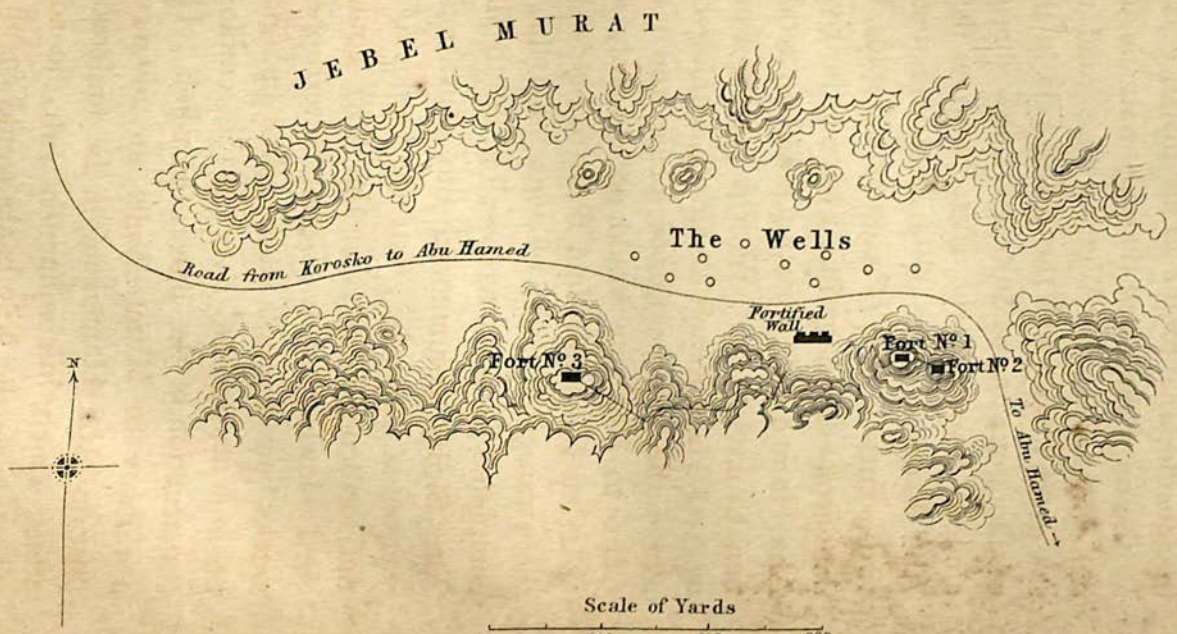
As correspondents—for some reasons into which I need not enter here—are not allowed for the present to proceed to Akasheh, and as, beyond the occasional arrival and departure of troops and the perpetual pushing on to the front of transport camels and supplies, nothing of interest is happening at Wady Halfa, I obtained permission from the Sirdar to undertake a journey through the Eastern desert to the wells of Murat, the southernmost post held by the Egyptians, and the nearest point to Khartum that Englishmen have visited for many a year. The correspondent of another paper accompanied me, and we decided to ride on our camels from Korosko to Murat Wells, and thence, after a day's rest, to return, by a direct course across the desert, to Wady Halfa, in all a journey of about 250 miles.

Such a journey could not fail to be interesting. We were to see how the Arab tribes, to whom the defence of the desert frontier is entrusted, fulfil their duties, and we were to follow what will undoubtedly become the great trade route between the Sudan

and Egypt as soon as Mahdism has collapsed. A caravan road crosses the desert from Korosko to Abu Hamed, a place which the Dervishes now hold in considerable force. The distance is 230 miles as the crow flies, and the only water is found about half-way, at Murat Wells. This road thus avoids the great loop which the Nile forms in the province of Dongola, and is quite 400 miles shorter than the sinuous course of the river between Korosko and Abu Hamed. The Nile, moreover, between these two points is full of cataracts, rapids, and shoals dangerous to navigation, whereas the river between Abu Hamed and Khartum offers no serious obstruction to navigation. With a railway from Korosko to Abu Hamed, and steamers running on the Nile above the last-mentioned place, the journey from Cairo to Khartum would occupy only seven days.

It has for some time been recognized that, from the strategical point of view, this line should be completed as soon as possible up to Murat Wells. The Sirdar commenced the construction of this section at Korosko; but the requisite funds were not forthcoming, so that the work could only proceed slowly and was often interrupted. A few weeks back the rails were pulled up, and they have been sent up the river to be employed in the construction of the line to Akasheh. Had we now a railway to Murat Wells, an advance from that post on Abu Hamed might be undertaken, a flank attack which, in conjunction with the advance from Akasheh up the Nile bank, would in all probability

THE WELLS OF MURAT



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compel the Dervishes rapidly to abandon the province of Dongola, for the oppressed inhabitants of that portion of the Nile valley, reassured by seeing the Government troops in possession of Abu Hamed, would then no doubt fulfil their promises to us, desert *en masse* from the Dervish army in whose forefront they have been forced to fight, and take their part in driving their Baggara tyrants out of the land.

But there can be no doubt that, if a policy of half-measures is now adopted in this country, the inhabitants, who of old trusted us only to be betrayed and left in the lurch, will naturally doubt our will or power to protect them; fearing the Khalifa's vengeance they will perforce still fight against us, though ready to rally round us if our troops but go before them. If it is given out that our advance shall not be beyond this place or that; for example, that, having reached Dongola, we shall be content to remain there; this will, of course, be construed in Omdurman into a confession of our weakness; the prestige of the Khalifa will revive, and he will no doubt order, as he has done before, that the people who have proved faithless to him and have held communication with us shall be destroyed. He will, of course, have heard that, when Abd-el-Azim a few weeks back demonstrated on the Nile below Abu Hamed, the riverain population, disarmed by the Dervishes and in great distress, assured the Ababdeh sheikh that they longed for the arrival of the British and Egyptian

troops, and were prepared to render assistance to their deliverers. These people, encouraged by the report of our present expedition thus frankly to express their true sentiments, are likely to fall victims to the false hopes we have encouraged—as has befallen many others in this country—if we now fail to carry through this undertaking.

If it is intended—as all here earnestly hope that it is intended—to crush the Khalifa's power now once and for all, and to liberate these enslaved populations, a railway from Korosko to Abu Hamed will do much to accelerate this desirable end. Mr. Birch, the railway engineer, states that he can lay a light portable railway of 2 ft. 6 in. gauge across this desert at the rate of between ten and fifteen miles a day. Such a line would suffice for military purposes. One of the three river gunboats now in course of construction, which I have described in a former letter, could steam from Abu Hamed to Khartum in two days; strongly armed and well protected as these steamers will be, they have little to fear from Dervish opposition, and could bombard Omdurman very effectively.

When the light railway had served its purpose the permanent line could take its place. For the trade of the Sudan will eventually find its outlet to the north by the Nile valley, as was the case of old, and the Suakin route will fall into disuse after the downfall of Mahdism has completely opened the country. Suakin is an unhealthy place, which the merchants will be glad to abandon; the harbour is

a bad one, and cannot be entered by large vessels. Moreover, though the Berber-Suakin road is so far the shortest between the Sudan and the sea, it has been found that transport by the long Nile valley route is less costly, as the heavy Suez Canal dues have to be paid on goods passing through Suakin to and from Europe.

These brackish little pools of Murat, which I was now to visit, lying as they do in mid-desert, on the very frontier, half-way between the Egyptian and Dervish posts of Korosko and Abu Hamed, are obviously of considerable strategic importance, and their possession has been contested in many a fight, during the past decade, between our Beduin friendlies and the Khalifa's raiding bands. Murat, being at the centre of the great arc formed by the Nile, with many practicable tracks radiating from it to the river, is the key of this portion of the desert, and once held by either side enables that side to outflank the enemy.

I have explained in a former letter that the defence of all the desert frontier between the Red Sea and the Nile, and beyond the Nile into the Western desert, has been entrusted to the Beduin tribes, the Ababdeh, the Bisharin, the Kababish, and others. These tribes have never favoured Mahdism, and for some years have rendered the Egyptian Government good service by opposing any Dervish advance upon the desert wells. It is true that their loyalty has sometimes proved lukewarm. The Bisharin, for example, for a period,

observed a prudent and profitable neutrality—that is, while abstaining from assisting the Dervishes, they refused to pay any taxes to the Egyptian Government. The subsidized Ababdeh sheikhs, too, on occasion played a double game, and the wily Bishir Bey, whom I met at Assuan, was discovered to have held treasonable communications with the enemy, and narrowly escaped hanging. It is not to be wondered at that the loyalty of the Beduin thus occasionally wavered. Had they not seen other tribes, which, at the instigation of the Government, had taken up arms against the rebels, afterwards abandoned to their fate, to be put to the sword by the Dervishes? It is not because they have any affection for or any confidence in the Government, or because they place any faith in the promises of English or Egyptians, that these Arabs are ready to fight on our side, but because they entertain a deep and ever-intensifying detestation of the Khalifa's tyranny. Mistrusting us, they mistrust the Khalifa far more, knowing how he has treacherously put to death his own followers, and is prepared to sacrifice all his other subjects in order to support the supremacy in the Sudan of his own savage tribe. And yet straightforward dealing can readily win the Arabs' confidence. For years they have been brought into contact with British officers on the frontier, and these, at least, they respect and implicitly trust.

It was as far back as 1884 that the Sirdar (then Captain Kitchener) and Lieutenant (now Major)

Rundle undertook a mission into the Eastern desert, which resulted in the reassuring of the Ababdeh, Bisharin, Foggara, and other tribes, the establishment of posts in the desert, and the organization of that system of frontier defence by Beduin irregulars that has prevailed ever since. Later on Major Kitchener won over the warlike and powerful Kababish tribe, which under its gallant leader Saleh long harassed the Dervishes, and defeated the redoubtable Nejumi himself, but was at last overpowered and annihilated at the battle of the wells of Om Badr, when Saleh was killed. The few Kababish who are now patrolling for us the western bank of the Nile are the small remnant that is left of that once numerous and brave people. The attitude of these Arab friendlies, who from the desert wells threatened either flank of the invader's advance down the Nile valley, contributed largely to the collapse of the successive attempts made by the Mahdi and the Khalifa to overrun and conquer Egypt.

Murat Wells, from its position the most important of the desert posts, has often changed hands. When the Mahdi in 1885 ordered the invasion of Egypt it was his intention to send two columns down the Nile valley and another column across the desert from Abu Hamed to Korosko. But the latter force never ventured to advance, for the wells of Murat, the only water on that 230 miles of desert road, were in the hands of the Ababdeh. In 1886, when the withdrawal of the British troops to Assuan

and the retirement of the frontier to Wady Halfa inspirited the Dervishes, who had been discouraged by their defeat at Ginnis, Nejumi, instructed by the Khalifa to make preparations for another invasion of Egypt, took the precaution to patrol the desert between Abu Hamed and Murat Wells; and in 1887, when he commenced to advance, a party of Dervishes seized the wells and thence organized frequent raids on the Nile villages. The perpetual menace of these raids made it necessary for the Government to establish fortified posts at several points between Assuan and Wady Halfa. In 1888 we withdrew all British troops from Assuan and left the protection of the frontier to the Egyptians; on this the Dervishes seized the wells of Haimur and Ongat, which are to the north of Murat, and from these, for some time, raided the Nile valley with impunity, looting cattle and murdering the villagers. In 1889 the Khalifa, whose heart was still set upon the conquest of Egypt, made strenuous efforts to win over the Ababdeh and the Bisharin; and, failing to shake their loyalty, he despatched a force of 500 men to occupy Murat Wells. In the meanwhile Nejumi was advancing with his invading army to meet his fate at Toski. Saleh Bey of Korosko, the head sheikh of the Ababdeh, now volunteered to raise a force of his tribesmen and drive the Dervishes out of Murat. This he succeeded in doing, and he followed the fleeing enemy to the neighbourhood of Abu Hamed.

For some time after the battle of Toski this

portion of the frontier was left comparatively undisturbed by the disheartened Dervishes; but in November 1893, a party of the enemy attacked the Ababdeh irregulars who held the wells of Murat and succeeded in seizing a commanding hill, on which one of the forts now stands. Saleh Bey was killed while attempting to drive them from this position. The Ababdeh, seeing their leader fall, were about to take to flight, when Saleh Bey's young brother, Abd-el-Azim, rallied the men and completely routed the Dervishes, after severe losses had been incurred on either side. Abd-el-Azim's gallantry on this occasion brought him before the notice of the Government, and he is now in command of the Ababdeh irregulars, who hold the wells. Abd-el-Azim belongs to one of the noblest and most influential families in the Sudan, and is a son of Hussein Pasha Khalifa, the last Governor of Berber, who surrendered that city to the Mahdi. Several members of this family are at present serving in the Khalifa's army, most probably much against their will. The head of the family is Ahmed Bey, now the chief sheikh of the Ababdeh, Abd-el-Azim's eldest brother. He is at present at Murat Wells, and is doing good political service for the Government. Shortly after the death of Saleh Bey the Government decided to establish a permanent post at Murat Wells. Captain Machell therefore marched to Murat with 300 men of his battalion and constructed the three forts which now protect the wells. Since then a company of black

troops has always been stationed here; but now, for the first time, the relieving company will consist of Egyptian troops.

Murat is now so strongly defended that it would be impossible for the Dervishes to seize it by a *coup de main*, neither could they remain many days before it, for from whatever point on the Nile they came they would have to bring with them water for the homeward as well as for the outward journey. The Ababdeh not only hold Murat, but also all the other wells in this desert—those of Tel-el-Abda, Mar Iteb, Girit, Abu Araga, Esmat, Omar, and Ongat to the east and north-east of Murat, and, still further north and nearer the banks of the Nile, the wells of El Glib, Haimur, and Obu Humal, some of which are on the caravan route from Berber to Assuan. There were also some natural reservoirs of water in the hills of this neighbourhood, but these the Ababdeh have all emptied, so that the Dervishes may not make use of them. Fortunately for us there are no wells in the desert south of the latitude of Murat. Several frequented routes radiate from Murat to the Nile; there is no water on any of these. The Dervishes cannot now procure water in the Eastern desert, and unless they seize some of the above-mentioned wells—a difficult matter so long as the southernmost, Murat, is so strongly garrisoned—they cannot well fall upon our present line of communication.

On the evening of April 25 my companion and myself took passage on a gunboat that was descend-

ing the Nile from Wady Halfa to Korosko, while our four camels were placed on a barge which was towed alongside. We reached Korosko early on the following morning, and found the climate as unpleasant as it was when we were there a few weeks back. Korosko is shut in by bare rocky heights which keep off the wind, so that it is one of the hottest places in the Nile valley; the heat, too, is damp and oppressive—a rare thing in these regions—while by day one is maddened by a plague of flies. Even my black Sudanese servant complained, and said he hoped we should not linger long in such a frying-pan, but should push on quickly into the more bracing and salubrious climate of the Nubian desert. Major Wingate had provided us with letters to the Ababdeh sheikh Abd-el-Azim, who is in command of the Arab irregulars at Murat Wells, and also to this sheikh's wakeel in Korosko, instructing them to give us every assistance. We soon found the courteous wakeel, who undertook to supply us with an escort of six men of his tribe. "Six men will be of as much use to you as a dozen men would be," he naïvely said, "for if you do encounter a party of Dervishes and cannot get away you will probably be cut up." According to the information gathered by Abd-el-Azim during his recent demonstration on the Nile below Abu Hamed, and the reports of other Beduin friendlies who had been patrolling the desert, it was extremely improbable that we should encounter any of the enemy, but there was, of course, a chance of our

doing so, and it was only three weeks earlier that a band of Dervishes had made a raid on the road we were to follow and had destroyed a portion of the telegraph line between Korosko and Murat Wells.

We were compelled to stay several days at Korosko, for it was explained to us by our Ababdeh friends that our camels would have to be trained in the usual manner to prepare them for a waterless desert journey. No one but an Arab understands anything of the mysterious ways of a camel, so with implicit confidence we handed over our animals to the men of our escort to undergo this necessary preparation for the road, which they endured with the camel's usual sulky patience. For four or five days before setting out on such a journey the camel's ordinary very dry diet of chopped straw is exchanged for the more nourishing stalks of maize, and no water is given to him until just before the start, when he is allowed to drink his fill. He is thus able to travel to the next wells, a hard week's journey off, or more, without needing water. So, while our camels were lying on the hot sand accustoming themselves to thirst, we had ample time to complete our own preparations. We purchased goatskins, wherein to carry our own supply of water, and also borrowed from the Government a pair of the iron mule tanks now supplied to the Egyptian army. The water, of course, gets much hotter in these tanks than in the porous skins, but in the latter it often acquires an unpleasant odour

and taste, while there is considerable wastage. Following the advice of the Arabs we were careful to take a large supply of water, for, as they pointed out, accidents sometimes happen in the desert; we might have to conceal ourselves among the rocks for days or make a long detour in order to avoid the Dervishes; and not a drop of water was there to be found between the Nile and Murat Wells. To have a sufficiency of water with us was our one consideration; in all other respects we travelled as light as possible, dispensed with tents and beds, and carried only necessary stores.

I found that my friend, the Turkish officer, who was commandant when I first visited Korosko, had been despatched to Wady Halfa with his men; and now an English officer, Captain Wallace, of the Gloucestershire Regiment, is acting as commandant. The garrison consists of four companies of the 15th Egyptian battalion. This is one of the two reserve battalions; so all the men have served their six years in the army, and are of the best age for active service, tall, broad, well-set-up fellows, who march with a magnificent swing. I have never seen finer-looking men. Captain Wallace is the one British officer in Korosko. Time does not hang heavy on his hands, for he is ever fully occupied in pushing on camels and supplies to Wady Halfa. The transport arrangements would probably have got hopelessly muddled, and the advance would have been indefinitely delayed, had not energetic British officers been scattered thus all along the line of

communication from Cairo to the front, to stir up the somewhat sluggish Egyptians, and to see that all instructions are properly carried out. The reserve battalions will be officered by Englishmen, and Captain Wallace has recently been given the command of the 15th battalion.

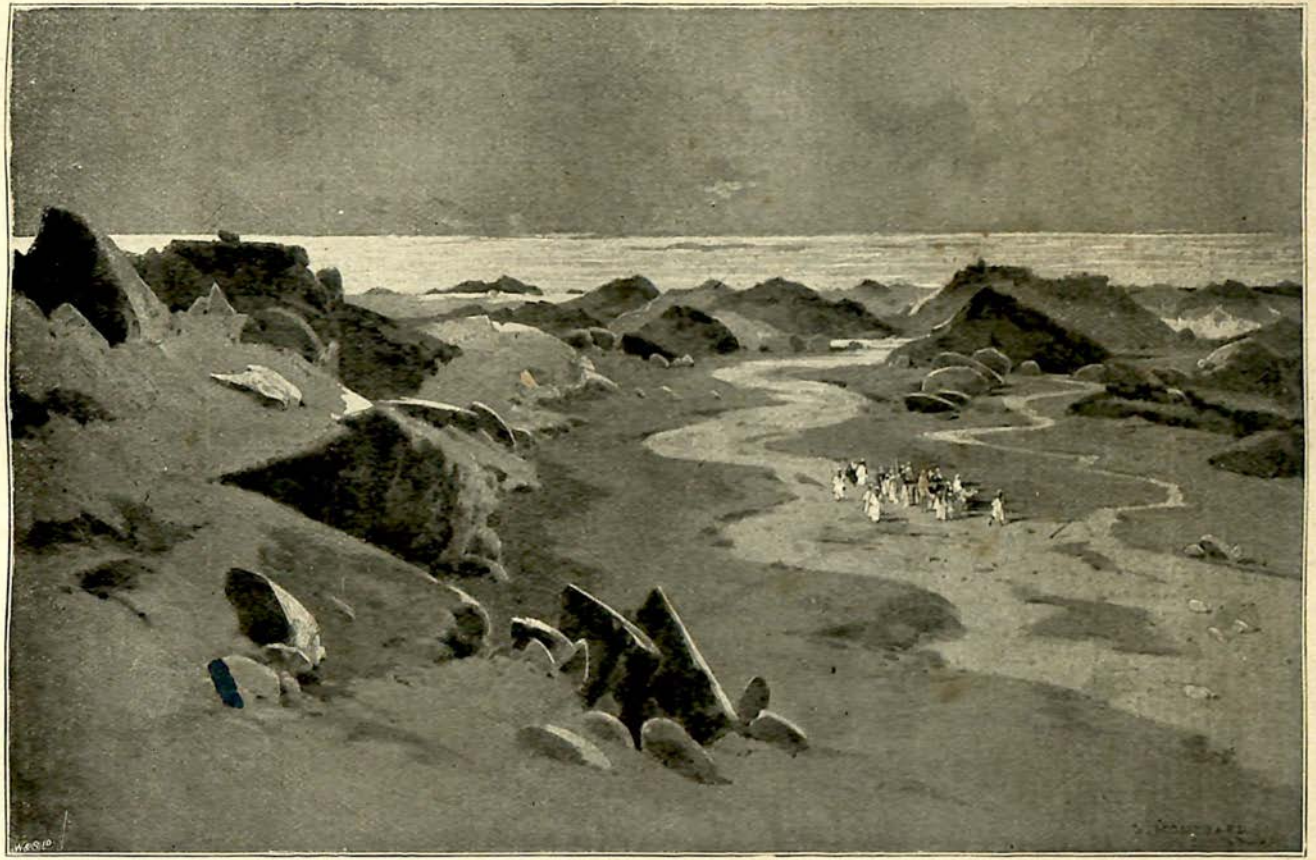
There is yet one other Englishman now in Korosko, a sergeant in the Gloucestershire Regiment, who has been sent up here as drill instructor. He is, by the way, possibly the best boxer in Egypt, and has taken it upon himself to impart the noble art of self-defence to the Egyptian soldiers in their leisure moments. A good many British sergeants are now attached to the Egyptian army as instructors, and one comes across them at nearly every military station. They make their influence felt in a remarkable way, and leaven the native battalions with their own soldierly qualities. They often acquire the language with an astonishing facility. One day, at Wady Halfa, I watched for some time one of these sergeants, who had been only a few months in the country, as he put through their facings his awkward squad of blacks—savages, many of them, of low intelligence, speaking various uncouth dialects of the Sudan. And yet there was this young Englishman contriving in some wonderful way to drive into their dull brains a comprehension of what he required of them, and obtaining marvellous results in a very short time. There he is employed for six hours daily, carefully explaining, and vigorously abusing too when necessary, in his

freshly-acquired Arabic, while giving the orders in Turkish, as is the rule in the Egyptian army, a concession to the fiction that Turkey can still call upon the Egyptian troops to fight her battles. These British sergeants appear to understand the men, are in touch with them, are patient with the clumsy but willing recruits, and quite appreciate the many good qualities and the soldierly spirit of the Sudanese blacks. One realizes here of what excellent stuff the British non-commissioned officer is made, quickly adapting himself to strange conditions, intelligently grasping his duty, and making himself respected by the natives. We found no other fellow-countrymen in Korosko, but we were claimed as *confrères* by a native journalist, a swarthy Arab, who is the local correspondent of *Al Mokattam*, a paper which, as he was careful to explain to us, is not one of those subsidized by the French to cast abuse on all things British.

We did not, after all, cross the desert under the sole escort of our six Ababdeh. We found that a company of the 15th battalion was to march to Murat on May 1, to relieve a company of the 13th black regiment, that had been stationed there since last March, when the Dervishes were reported to be meditating a determined attack on the wells. We therefore decided to accompany the troops, as it would be interesting to observe how Egyptian soldiers conducted themselves when not under the observation of their British officers. So, on May 1, my companion and myself had all ready for the

start, our water-skins were filled, our camels had their final drink. It was the hottest day we had experienced, even in Korosko. A sand-storm was raging in the desert, and nothing a hundred yards off was visible; the air was stifling, and the only thermometer in Korosko, which was in the hospital, indicated 117° in the shade. The company marched out at 3 p.m., about one hundred strong. The men looked smart in their kharki uniforms and putties, and each had wound loosely round his tarboosh—surely the worst head-covering possible for a hot climate—a white cloth to protect him from dust and glare. They carried their rifles, but no packs. Fifty camels, carrying only water-skins, bedding, and light baggage, accompanied the column, and on these the men took it in turn to ride. There were also a number of Ababdeh irregulars with us, mounted on small camels, who looked picturesque in their flowing dress, each with his Remington rifle at his back and his cartridge belt round his waist, the leaders with great straight swords hanging at their sides. About one hundred other camels were laden with the heavy baggage, the forage, and water for the march, and also with a number of tanks full of Nile water for the use of the Egyptian officers at Murat, who do not relish the brackish water from the wells. Three Egyptian officers—a captain and two lieutenants—were in charge.

As with our faster and lightly-laden camels we could easily overtake the troops, we let them go ahead, and remained at Korosko till four o'clock,



THE ROAD THROUGH THE DESERT TO MURAT WELLS, SEEN FROM THE HILLS ABOVE KOROSKO.

when with our six Ababdeh we trotted off through an opening in the bare hills behind the town, crossed the formation of the railway, from which the rails had been stripped, and followed the telegraph line until about seven o'clock, when the grunting of many camels told us that we were nearing the camp. Then we were challenged by a sentry in the dark, and soon found ourselves among our friends. The troops had got in an hour before, and were allowed only an hour's halt to prepare their food and eat it. So once more the camels were loaded up, within a remarkably short time, be it said, of the giving of the order, and the march was resumed. It was already obvious that a strict discipline was maintained; there was no slackness in any of the arrangements. We marched all night, and halted for another hour at dawn, and then rode on again until 9 a.m. The wind had fallen, but the atmosphere was still full of fine sand, and this morning it was a silver sun that rose through the grey dust haze. When we halted, at nine, the sun's rays were beginning to be fierce. We were under some high, black, rocky hills, full of little caves and crannies; the men climbed up to these, and each took shelter in his own shaded hollow; so that they looked like so many sea-birds, as one often sees them nestling on the face of some weather-beaten ocean cliff.

And now I began to understand what wonderfully tough fellows these Egyptian soldiers are, and how ready they are when called upon to undertake forced marches of almost incredible severity. The

men had halted at 9 a.m.; at midday, to our astonishment, they were off again to tramp it, sometimes on soft sand, through the hottest hours of the day. At six in the evening there was another two hours' halt, and then once more they marched through the night, taking only two very short halts by the way. And so these extraordinary men tramped on day and night for three days without uttering a complaint. They were travelling at least eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, and not once did they halt for upwards of three hours. For how many more days they could have gone on thus I cannot say, but theirs was certainly a feat worthy of record. They accomplished this journey of 120 miles across the desert, in the hot season, in sixty-five hours—that is, at the rate of forty-four miles a day—and only ten men fell out on the way. One would imagine that travelling after this fashion, with halts so short that the loading and unloading of the camels left scarcely any time for food or sleep, would be very trying to men; but these indefatigable Egyptians seemed not to mind it in the least. We two Englishmen are sufficiently inured to hard travelling, but we like to know when one day's work is over and when another commences, and perpetual motion is not to our taste. We therefore divided our marches after our own ideas. Thus, when the soldiers at 8 p.m., after their two hours' halt, moved on again, we two, having had our supper, spread our blankets on the sand and slept till eleven o'clock—and there is no more

refreshing sleep than one enjoys when bivouacking in the cool, pure, bracing air of the desert after sunset. Riding off again at eleven o'clock, and putting our camels to the trot—a pace of about five miles an hour—we used to overtake the column at dawn. We travelled about fifteen hours each day.

This portion of the Nubian desert is as utterly desolate as any region in the world. Until we were near the wells we perceived no signs of vegetable or animal life. Even the Dead Sea fruit cannot grow in this arid soil, on which rain and dew never fall; there were no insects to be seen and not a vulture floated overhead. For the first sixty miles we traversed a sort of pass, a broad valley of glaring sand which penetrates the hilly country bordering the Nile valley; it looks as if it may have been a water-course thousands of years ago, and rounded pebbles lie among the sand. This valley is bordered by the weird hills of brown or coal-black rock so characteristic of the desert, sometimes rising in isolated pyramids, and sometimes forming deeply-serrated ranges, generally honeycombed and apparently crumbling to pieces. The traveller to Murat requires no guide, for all he has to do is to follow the telegraph wire; but, even if there were no wire, he could not miss the road, strewn as it is with the bleached bones of the camels that have perished on the way. There must be many thousands of these skeletons between Korosko and Murat—we could always see a half-dozen or so round us—and I am told that the road beyond

Murat to Abu Hamed is also a lane of bones across the desert.

At dawn, on May 3, we emerged from the pass by a narrow defile known as the Bab el Korosko, to cross the Bahr Belama (waterless sea), a great plain of sand with not a rock to afford shade during a halt; this passed, we entered a pleasanter region where the sand was covered with isolated hills containing many caves. We overtook the troops as usual at dawn on May 4, and rode on with them till we were about ten miles from Murat; here we entered a valley where to our astonishment we saw camel-thorn growing, and the trunks of some dead date palms rising from the sand, the first sign of vegetation on the road. One of our Ababdeh told us that the hill on our right was called the Djebel Moyyah (water-mountain), on whose slopes the rain sometimes falls and, collecting in natural reservoirs, sustains a scanty vegetation. I afterwards ascertained that this was the case, but that the camel-thorns are likely to die off soon, as the more delicate palms have done before them; for in the first place it has not rained for a year on the hill, and in the second place the Ababdeh, as they do not keep a guard at this place, have emptied the natural reservoir of all its water, so as to prevent the Dervishes from making use of it.

The long march of these patient soldiers was now drawing to a close. They showed signs of fatigue this morning, but still not one of them grumbled. They had cheery replies to return to any remark

that was made to them, and said they did not wish to halt any more, but preferred to push on until they reached their destination. After congratulating Captain Yousef Fehmi on the wonderful march his men had made, we rode in ahead of the troops, over some rather rough ground where the navvies will have work to do before even a light railway can be laid down. I mention this because, for the rest of the way from Korosko, the ground is nearly always as level as a billiard table, and few difficulties will be encountered.

At last we opened out a broad sandy basin or valley enclosed by rugged hills of black rock, on the summits of three of which we perceived forts. On the sands below we saw camels, sheep, and goats. There was no vegetation, and no pools were visible, but several small mounds scattered over the valley indicated the places where men had dug for water. "The wells of Murat," said our guide; and, though we were yet afar off, our camels, smelling the water or detecting its presence by some other sense, began to display symptoms of restlessness. Their necks stretched straight out as if dragged by some unseen influence, and their pace steadily increased. As with Sindbad's vessel when it neared the island of loadstone, so was it now with our "ships of the desert" as they approached the wells. "We must now keep all the camels in line, close together, neck by neck," said one of our Ababdeh, "or they will make a mad race for the water." To be on the top of a bolting camel, galloping like the wind, with the

action of a Cape wagon on a rocky track, must be an unpleasant experience, more especially as the camel does not lessen his pace a jot until he reaches the water, when he quite suddenly, in full gallop, tucks up his legs and drops on his stomach, an abrupt fashion of stopping which is apt to leave the rider in the air, to travel some dozen yards further before his lessening momentum permits him to alight. So we did not neglect the precautions recommended to us, and trotted on in line, the camels each moment straining harder to be off. We held them back with ever-increasing effort till our arms wearied with pulling the reins and we had drawn the heads of the camels backwards until they almost touched the saddles. Avoiding the wells, we brought the animals to a gateway in a fortified wall which blocked the mouth of a small gully lying at the foot of one of the forts, and dismounted without accident. - Passing within the gateway, we found ourselves in a small triangular sandy flat formed by the mouth of the gully and bordered by steep rocks on two sides. Tents and huts were scattered over it, and we saw Sudanese soldiers and wild-looking Arab irregulars engaged in different duties. At night all the camels and other animals are driven within this enclosure for protection. We were now met and heartily welcomed by the Egyptian commandant, Captain Mahmoud Bahgat, of the 13th Regiment; Ahmed Bey, the head sheikh of the Ababdeh; his brother Abd-el-Azim, in command of the irregulars; and the black officers of the 13th

Sudanese Regiment. Shortly after our arrival, at about ten o'clock, the Egyptian company marched up in excellent style, the men at the finish resuming their usual springy stride as if all their fatigue had vanished.

This morning Captain Mahmoud Bahgat, having been relieved by the Egyptian company, will march to Korosko with his Sudanese. I will therefore close this letter and send it by him, reserving the description of this very interesting place for another letter.

VI

MURAT WELLS, *May* 7.

I CONCLUDED my last letter with an account of the arrival of another correspondent and myself at this place on May 4, after a rapid march across the desert in the company of 100 Egyptian reservists. I have very good reason to be pleased that I undertook this journey, for at Murat I have seen and heard much that was of great interest. In the first place, I was enabled more fully to realize the efficiency and the trustworthiness of the remodelled Egyptian army when I observed that the defence of Murat—the furthest Egyptian post in the Nubian desert, the nearest to the Sudan, a post whose importance, as I explained in my last letter, it is difficult to overrate—is at present entirely left to native troops, officered by natives, no supervision by British officers being deemed necessary. Now that I have marched and lived with the Egyptian soldiery I am more impressed than ever by the excellence of this little army, not only by the soldierly qualities and good discipline of the rank and file, but by the smartness and keenness of the Egyptian officers. How different it all was but fourteen years ago, and

would be again were we to go now and leave the work unfinished! It is the fashion for foreigners to sneer at our military incapacity; but the extraordinary transformation that has been effected in Egypt by a handful of British officers should convince our critics that we at least possess some talent for organizing very fair armies out of most unpromising material. At the time of my arrival the three races from which the Egyptian soldiery is drawn were all represented in the Murat garrison. There was the fellaheen company of the 15th battalion, with which we had marched up from Korosko, the black company of the 13th Sudanese battalion, which we had come to relieve, and, lastly, the 200 Beduin irregulars of the Ababdeh tribe under Abd-el-Azim Bey. It was pleasant to observe how the men of these different breeds, having little save their religion in common, fraternized; there appeared to be no jealousies among them; while their officers—the Egyptian and black captains and the Arab sheikhs—were apparently very good friends. I noticed that the provisions for defence were as carefully made, that the same good order and discipline prevailed, as would be the case if the best trained European troops composed the garrison. The men, too, stationed at this dreary spot, in mid desert, appeared to be quite content, as indeed they should be, for no conscript troops in Europe are nearly so well paid and fed, and the comforts of the British soldier are not more carefully attended to.

The commandant of Murat, Captain Mahmoud

Bahgat, of the 13th battalion, showed us great kindness and was ever ready to assist us in every way. He speaks English well and gave me much useful information. He is a good type of the Egyptian officer of the new school, intelligent, well-educated, a smart and zealous soldier, anxious to perfect himself in all the duties of his profession. He placed a tent at our disposal in the sandy enclosure which I described in my last letter, and, after we had rested for an hour and drank coffee with the officers, he accompanied us to the forts and wells.

The rugged volcanic rocks of the Jebel Murat here enclose a sandy basin or valley, about a mile in length, narrowing at the two extremities, but broadening to about 600 yards in the centre. Water is found at about 15 feet below the surface on digging into the sand in almost any part of this valley. The valley runs from west to east, and is traversed by the road from Korosko to Abu Hamed. The forts constructed by Captain Machell at the close of 1893 for the protection of the wells crown three peaks on the south side of the valley. Fort No. 2 is the most easterly, and commands the road to Abu Hamed, which here turns abruptly to the south. Fort No. 1 is immediately to the west of fort No. 2, being divided from it by a narrow gap of the mountain. Below fort No. 1, and commanded by it, is the sandy enclosure to which I have already alluded, shut in by two rocky spurs of the mountain, its mouth blocked by a fortified wall carried across it from one spur to the other. The camels, sheep,

and goats are driven within this enclosure at night. There are a few huts here for the accommodation of some of the officers and for a guard. Fort No. 3 is on a peak about 600 yards further west. The aspect of the valley—devoid as it is of any trace of vegetation, a waste of sand shut in by precipitous peaks and masses of coal-black rock broken into fantastic shapes and sloping in *couloirs* of *débris*—is dreary enough; but, seen from the wells, the three forts with their towers and irregular walls following the dips of the precipice (bearing some resemblance to the fortresses of the Indian hill tribes) present a very picturesque appearance.

The commandant, before taking us over the forts, gave us a good proof of the excellent arrangements that had been made for the defence against Dervish surprise. He unexpectedly ordered a bugler to sound the alarm. It was the heat of the day—and it is really hot here—so Murat was reposing; the men were lying in the shade of rock or wall. But now in a moment it became a scene of bustling activity; the men leapt from the ground on which they were sleeping, poured out of the hut doors, and flocked in from the wells through the gateway of the fortified wall, which was then closed against the imaginary foe. The sands below and the crags above swarmed with the defenders hurrying to their various posts, silently and without any confusion, for each knew what he had to do. It was well done and it was a picturesque spectacle. The 100 men of the 15th Egyptian battalion, weary as they were

after their long desert march from Korosko, seized their rifles and ran down to line the fortified wall. Such of the black troops and Ababdeh as were below, scrambled nimbly up the crags to the three forts, whose walls soon bristled with riflemen.

Then the commandant and the sheikh Ąbd-el-Azim, the latter in snowy robe and with a great sword at his side, led us up the rocks by narrow tracks to the forts, which are surrounded by wire entanglements as a further defence against Dervish raids. The forts are roughly constructed of mud, stone, and timber, and answer their purpose very well. An enemy unprovided with artillery would find it extremely difficult to dislodge a force that held them. Standing on three lofty rocky pinnacles they command all the approaches to the wells, and from their towers the commandant pointed out to us all the tracks—waterless without exception—that lead to the Nile; to the north-west the road to Korosko by which we had come, a four days' journey for laden camels; then the roads to Wady Halfa and Akasheh; to the south the road to Dongola, a seven days' journey; and that to Abu Hamed, which laden camels traverse in three days and a half. All round us, as far as we could see, stretched the desolate waste of black and brown rocks and gleaming sands; of all deserts I should say that the Nubian is the most uncompromisingly desert. The walls of the forts as we entered were still lined with the defenders—the 100 blacks of the 13th Sudanese battalion and the 200 Ababdeh irregulars, under the

command of Abd-el-Azim. These Beduin of the Ababdeh tribe are almost as black as the Sudanese themselves, but their features are purely Caucasian and they are often singularly handsome. Many of these irregulars at Murat are wild and fierce-looking fellows with their long black hair twisted into great mops and plastered with fat. With their small hands and feet, slim supple limbs, glistening white teeth, and lean wolfish faces they look what they are, the true children of the desert, men of a free and warrior race who have often fought before and are ready to do so again, more especially when there is a big reward to be gained, as is the case on this occasion. The blacks of the Sudanese battalion looked very business-like in their kharki uniform and putties, well-set-up fellows all, who can be relied upon to fight well whenever called upon to do so. Each fort was under the command of a black officer. These Sudanese negroes make excellent officers, have the true soldierly spirit, take a pride in their honourable profession, and are keenly jealous of the reputation of their particular battalions. In No. 1 and No. 2 forts seven-pounder brass guns are mounted, so that shrapnel and common shell would make it impossible for the Dervishes to draw water from the wells day or night.

We then descended to the sandy plain, and the commandant and Abd-el-Azim led us to the scene of the last serious encounter with the Dervishes. Here, in a little ravine at the eastern extremity of the valley, the Ababdeh sheikh showed us the spot

where he had fallen on the Dervishes in November 1893, won his spurs, and avenged his brother Saleh's death. The Beduin do not bury the dead of their enemy, so the bottom of this wild ravine is still strewn with the remains of the slaughtered Dervishes. Here we saw, scattered over the sand, bleached skulls and bones, and rags of white cloth, on which we could distinguish the square blue patches that mark the Mahdist uniform. What the vulture spares remains unchanged for an indefinite time in this dry climate ; thus, though two and a half years have elapsed since the fight, the hands and feet of the dead men, which were not stripped of their flesh, are in a state of perfect preservation, while the ground is covered with large shreds of human skin that has been converted into thick tough leather.

Leaving this ghastly scene, we walked up the sandy valley to the burial-place where lie the Ababdeh who fell fighting under Saleh Bey. Hard by we saw the ruins of a large square tomb built of stones. Abd-el-Azim told us that an Englishman who died here twenty years ago was buried beneath it, and that a tablet with an inscription on it had been sent out from England by his family, and had been placed on the tomb ; the Ababdeh had always respected it, but the Dervishes, in one of their frequent raids, had desecrated and broken up the grave as being that of one of the hated Christians. Next we visited the famous wells that make this the most important post in the Eastern desert. There is not

much to see. From a distance large ant-hills appear to be scattered over the valley; these are the mounds of earth that are thrown up while digging for water. It is the custom to close the water-holes after they have been in use for some time and to open others. The number of holes kept open at any time depends upon the demand for water. The arrival here of a large force would necessitate the immediate opening of fresh wells; but this could be effected within a few hours, as the wells are sunk to 2 ft. only below the water level—that is 17 ft. in all. The commandant assured me that as a rule 5000 camels can be watered here without difficulty. Sometimes in summer, however, the supply of water is much diminished; the water percolates but slowly through the soil, so that to use a well temporarily exhausts it. The water is then muddy, impregnated with mineral salts, and unwholesome for men and beasts. The Arabs told me that about once in every two years it rains very heavily for twenty-four hours or so on the slopes of the Jebel Murat range. These rain storms fill up the natural reservoirs in this neighbourhood, of which I spoke in my last letter, and which the Ababdeh have recently emptied so as to prevent the Dervishes from procuring water from them. The wells of Murat also are undoubtedly to a large extent dependent on these local rains, though, like other desert wells, they are fed by inexhaustible subterranean channels which bring the water from distant regions beyond the rainless zone. On drinking the water I found it very pleasant to

the taste, though slightly brackish, in consequence, I believe, of the presence of subcarbonate of soda. It is said to disagree with people accustomed to the soft Nile water, so tanks and skins are brought up from Korosko on camels for the use of the Egyptian officers at Murat. A condenser was set up here some time ago, but the scarcity of fuel rendered it of little avail, and it now lies on the sand a tangled wreck of tanks and piping, having been knocked down and smashed by a bolting camel.

Of the two Ababdeh sheikhs, Ahmed Bey and Abd-el-Azim Bey, we have seen a good deal during our stay. They frequently call and appear to enjoy a long talk with us as they sit cross-legged on carpets in our tent and smoke their long pipes. They are good specimens of high-bred Beduin. Ahmed Bey, the elder brother, and head of the tribe, is rather stout, as is the case with all Arabs when they approach middle age. He is of jovial disposition, has a keen sense of humour, and appears to be sincerely attached to the British officers with whom he has been brought into contact on the frontier; he is ever making inquiries of us about his old friends. Like other Ababdeh sheikhs he may have played a double game some years ago (who can blame him, for had he not seen Great Britain treacherously desert her allies?), but he is now undoubtedly loyal. He has ever detested the Khalifa, though the instinct of self-preservation may have caused him to waver in his allegiance to the Khedive. Now he realizes that Mahdism is doomed, that the side he

favours is also the strongest, so that he can openly support it without risk of being left in the lurch. Moreover, Ahmed Bey owns some valuable landed property on the banks of the Nile near Assuan—the gift of Ismail Pasha—and he knows that this would be forfeited were it discovered that he held any treasonable communications with the enemy. Abd-el-Azim, the younger brother, the soldier of the family, the captain of the Ababdeh irregulars, is of much slighter build than Ahmed, a wiry, athletic man, capable of enduring great privation and fatigue. He is remarkably handsome, and his expression is very pleasing; he looks a man that one can safely trust. He has a very quiet manner, and has much less to say for himself than his somewhat loquacious, and jolly, stout brother.

In the course of my many conversations with the two sheikhs—which, unfortunately, had to be conducted through an interpreter—I have contrived to acquire some insight into their true opinions on the situation in the Sudan, and these no doubt represent the views of the great majority of the inhabitants of the country. The disappointment will be bitter indeed if the British and Egyptian troops do not now bring the Khalifa's reign of terror to a close. The Ababdeh sheikhs, who are in constant communication with their numerous relatives and fellow tribesmen dwelling south of the frontier, and consequently subjects of the Khalifa, are kept very well informed as to all that is going on in the Mahdist country, so that their statements carry weight.

On one occasion Ahmed spoke thus:—"Mahdism is quite dead. The reconquest of the Sudan should not be difficult. There are no Mahdists now. All men in the Sudan know that Mohammed Ahmed was no Mahdi, for was he not vanquished in battle, and did he not die of disease like other men! Abdullah el Taaisha himself no longer says he is the Khalifa of the Mahdi, but styles himself the Sultan of the Sudan. The Khalifa cannot hold himself forth as a holy man; he has no religion; he does things that no Mussulman would do, that no Jew would do. All men detest him, for he breaks every ordinance of our religion. Wherever he goes he seizes by force the young girls, many of them daughters of our best Sudanese families, and sends them to his harem. He casts them forth as soon as he wearies of them, and he has now 170 children." On being asked whether the Khalifa still considered his position unassailable, Ahmed Bey replied:—"He fears that his end is near; he knows that his friends are few, so he now keeps within the palace precincts at Omdurman 500 camels always prepared for a long journey. In case of disaster befalling his armies he hopes to load these camels with his treasures and to escape to his own mountains with the favourites of his household. But it is unlikely that he will succeed in this, for his people will stop him when they discover his intention, and there are many men of his own Baggara tribe who will have no scruple in killing him in order to possess themselves of his wealth."

Abd-el-Azim, for his part, was able to communicate some interesting incidents of his recent plucky demonstration in the Nile valley below Abu Hamed. It will be remembered that he followed the right bank of the river for eighty miles through Dervish country. He passed no Dervish posts, but found a miserable oppressed people longing for the arrival of the Government troops. They had all been disarmed and were left with no weapons save a few throwing spears. The Khalifa's emissaries had robbed them of their daughters, their camels, their crops, and their money, and out of each family a member had been taken to serve in the Khalifa's army, who would remain a hostage to secure the fidelity of his relations. In illustration of the reign of terror instituted by the Khalifa, Abd-el-Azim told me that in a large village in the Monassir district he found all the inhabitants groaning under the tyranny of one small Baggara youth, who obtains all he wants from the cowed people for the asking—their daughters, their money, and provisions. This young brute is wont to swagger up and down the village striking men, women, and children on the most sensitive parts of their bodies with his kourbash. When not employed in robbery he amuses himself by devising and practising ingenious tortures. Yet not a man dare resent such treatment, knowing what the consequences would be, not only to himself, but to all his relations and friends. This boy prudently crossed the Nile and hid away when he saw the Ababdeh approaching. Abd-el-

Azim was anxious to seize him and bring him to Wady Halfa.

Abd-el-Azim had ascertained that at Abu Hamed the Khalifa's forces consisted of but a few hundred irregulars and 200 black troops. None of these were trusted, and all their arms and ammunition were kept under lock and key by the Dervish chiefs, to be served out immediately before an engagement, when these miserable creatures would be driven forth with the kourbash to fight in the forefront of the battle. He learnt that at Berber there were 6000 men, Jehadia, Jaalin, and Baggara, of whom the last alone, numbering under 2000, can be relied on. There, too, the arms of the majority of the troopers have been taken from them. Ahmed Bey and Abd-el-Azim are very anxious to carry into execution a notable scheme they have devised. They wish to be allowed to seize Abu Hamed with the Ababdeh. They can do this, they told us, with a very small force; but in order to hold it against the Dervishes, who would probably march down upon them from Berber, they estimate that they would have to take with them 1500 of their tribe. They would also like to be accompanied by 400 men of a Sudanese battalion. They hope, in case they obtain permission to make this attack, that we—the other correspondent and myself—will go with them. It certainly would be a very interesting thing to do; but it is not at all likely that these enterprising sheikhs will be allowed to carry out their design,

which I only mention because it shows how keen our Beduin friendlies are and how ready to swoop on the enemy's country if we but slip the leash.

Ahmed Bey urged with reason that to advance, as he suggested, on Abu Hamed with black troops would have a very good effect. For then the black soldiers of the Khalifa, who have never been Mahdists at heart and are now very disaffected, seeing the men of the Sudanese battalion, men of their own blood, many of them their relations and friends, entering the country, would refuse to fight them, and would seize the first opportunity to desert to us. The Mahdi, and the Khalifa after him, always fully appreciated the fighting value of these gallant Sudanese blacks, and knew well that they formed the backbone of the Egyptian army. Some years back a great number of the men enrolled in the Sudanese battalions were deserters from the Khalifa's army. Indeed, our friends the Kababish received a reward of ten dollars for every Sudanese deserter they smuggled across the frontier to us. The battalions were also full of escaped black slaves. The Khalifa, alarmed at this wholesale desertion to the enemy of his best fighting men, took rigorous measures to prevent the blacks from going north. If a black slave now escapes, all the property of his owner is confiscated by the Khalifa. So we now get few deserters, though these poor kourbash-driven soldiers, hearing from their relatives in the Egyptian service how excellently they are treated, are but too anxious to change their flag.

The Khalifa's black soldiers would no doubt before this have risen in revolt were it not that the wives and children of so many of these hapless men, who are among the most affectionate of human creatures, are in the power of that cunning and merciless tyrant.

It is to be hoped that there will be an advance on Abu Hamed later on, if not in the manner suggested by my friends the sheikhs. The road from Korosko to Abu Hamed for the most part of the way crosses hard, flat sand. The light portable railway, as I telegraphed the other day, can be laid across the desert in less than twenty days at a cost of something over £200,000. The new gunboats can be carried on the railway in sections to Abu Hamed and there be launched, above all the serious difficulties of the Nile navigation, ready to bombard Berber and Omdurman. It ought to be realized that there will in all probability be a great saving of blood, money, and time if this is done.

The day after our arrival at Murat the sheikhs lent us some excellent camels and we rode with the commandant, Abd-el-Azim, and an escort of four Ababdeh for some distance to the south on the Abu Hamed road. Little frequented as this road is now, we did not find on it the long line of camel bones by which a traveller can find his way from Korosko. We reached a point from which we looked a long way down the track across the desert. We were now, as the commandant remarked, nearer to Khartum than any Europeans, save the Mahdi's

prisoners, had been for several years. Abu Hamed was but 100 miles distant, and we could have easily ridden there in two days on our camels; whereas by river Abu Hamed is 600 miles from Wady Halfa. On April 7, our friend the commandant, Captain Mahmoud Bahgat, with his company of sturdy blacks, having been relieved by the Egyptian company, left Murat for Korosko. The men will stay with their wives and families—who are quartered at Korosko—for a few days, and will then, after another farewell, march to the front to join their battalion. The Ababdeh now supply all the transport on this road, and 100 of their camels carried the baggage and supplies of the troops to Korosko. After the Sudanese had marched out, the company of the 15th Egyptian battalion garrisoned the fort, and Captain Yousef Fehmi became commandant.

To-morrow my companion and myself will set out to ride on our camels across the desert to Wady Halfa, a distance of 120 miles, which we ought to cover in about two days and a half. We are to be escorted by five Ababdeh. We applied by telegraph for permission to travel from here to Akasheh direct, but this we are not allowed to do, as it appears that on that road there is some risk of falling in with the Dervishes.

VII

WADY HALFA, *May* 17.

WHILE we stayed at Murat Wells my companion and myself received many kindly attentions from the courteous and hospitable Ababdeh sheikhs. They supplied us, among other things, with the most delicious mutton, which was not what one would expect to find in the heart of this desert, where not a blade of grass grows. I was told that the Arabs procure these sheep on the Red Sea coast and drive them up to Murat from Helaib, a distance of 260 miles as the crow flies. This suggested a new scheme to us. As correspondents were not permitted to move on to the front, and as there was little to be done at Wady Halfa, we thought that we might profitably occupy some of the time that must still elapse before any advance is made by crossing the desert to the sea and visiting Suakin. The Ababdeh sheikhs undertook to supply us with guides who would take us to Helaib in seven days by a route on which there are several wells, and which passes through an interesting country little known to Europeans. At the port of Helaib, which is 180 miles north of Suakin, we should find steamers to

take us to the latter place. But the authorities, when we applied to them, would not allow us to undertake this journey, as Arabs, who are still engaged in the slave trade, and who are therefore hostile to Europeans, are to be met with on this road.

While talking over various routes with the Ababdeh we realized how intimate is their knowledge of the desert. Their journeys are by no means confined to those regular tracks, radiating from Murat, which I described in another letter. One can engage guides at Murat who will take one direct to any place one may like to mention on the Red Sea shore or on the Nile bank. They know every well and pool of the desert, and the amount of water it can supply. At the same time these guides are not infallible, and occasionally they miss the wells for which they are making, and perish of thirst. Abd-el-Azim told us that the mirages, which are so frequent and so deceptive in the Nubian desert, are the chief cause of these mistakes. The landmarks by which the guides direct their course become invisible, or are distorted and unrecognizable; while sometimes the ghost of some familiar rock or tree—possibly many leagues away, and in a totally different direction—rises out of the desert to draw the unfortunate traveller to his destruction. The sheikh said that within his own memory ninety of the best Ababdeh guides had thus lost their way and died in the desert.

These Ababdeh are a most interesting people with whom to converse when they become commu-

nicative. Travelling, as they do, over all the desert between the Red Sea and the Nile, and being in constant communication with their friends in the Sudan and elsewhere, they have a very accurate knowledge of all that is going on throughout an immense tract of country. An Ababdeh carries in his head a map of a great part of Africa, and it is difficult to mention a place within his ken whose situation and distance he cannot roughly lay down. The information of our friends the sheikhs extended to the Congo Free State and to Uganda, and they knew all the details of the Italian campaign in Abyssinia. They told us some strange stories concerning recent events in that country which it is expedient not to repeat until they have been confirmed. They said, by the way, that many European officers were leading the troops of Menelik; they were quite certain of this, and assured us that they had this news from sources of information absolutely trustworthy. They also spoke of the rifles and ammunition which had been landed in quantities at certain Red Sea ports and thence carried by caravans into Abyssinia, some of which most probably will reach the Dervishes, to be used against us in the coming campaign.

Having again prepared our camels for the desert journey by depriving them of water for three days, and then, at the last moment, allowing them to drink their fill, we set out for Wady Halfa in the evening of May 8. We had with us, as guides and escort, five of the Ababdeh irregulars, each clad in a pictur-

esque white robe, girt with cartridge-belt, and with a Martini-Henry rifle slung on the saddle of the wiry little camel which he rode. On our outward journey our escort had been supplied with Remingtons; but, taking into consideration that we were not now, as then, marching with a company of soldiers, and that on the route we were to follow the risk of encountering Dervishes was greater, Abd-el-Azim had decided to arm the men with the superior weapon.

Having bidden farewell to the sheikhs and the Egyptian officers, whose kindness had made our stay in this remote desert post so pleasant, we rode off with our little caravan. We were eight in all—my fellow-correspondent and myself, each with saddle-bags and two goat-skins of water slung over the *makloofa* camel saddle, my Sudanese servant riding one of the baggage camels, and the five Ababdeh, whose camels carried forage and waterskins; while our second baggage camel bore no rider, but was laden with the forage for our camels as well as with our stores. We passed through the rock-bound valley of Murat by the way we had entered it, and then, leaving the telegraph wire and the bone-strewn track to Korosko on our right, we struck across the desert in a north-westerly direction. According to a recent rough measurement of this route, we had 128 miles of stony ground and sand to traverse before reaching the Nile; and our guides told us that for the greater part of the way we should be crossing open sandy plains, where no rocks or caves afford the traveller

shelter from the fierce sun during the midday halt.

Our first march was taken in the cool of the evening. We rode through a long and gloomy ravine which penetrates the Jebel Murat range; on either side of us were black crags, and the ground was covered with fragments of ironstone and other metallic rock, which had been fused and twisted by the action of fire into the semblance of knotted snakes and other strange shapes. The whole of this district is evidently volcanic, and the depressed sandy basin in which the wells of Murat are sunk was described by Sir Samuel Baker, who visited it in 1861, as an extinct crater. Throughout this ravine we saw a good deal of camel-thorn growing. This bush is found in most of the valleys in the immediate neighbourhood of Murat, though the surrounding desert is entirely destitute of vegetation. It is therefore probable that water would be found at no great depth on sinking wells in any part of this district. Murat may, indeed, have been, long ago, the centre of an extensive oasis, where cultivated fields gladdened the eye of the traveller after his desert journey; for as we rode down the ravine our guides pointed out to us the ruins of many stone huts and tombs, and also of what apparently had been small forts. These, they said, had been built by the men of an unknown race, who had disappeared from the earth many ages ago, and of whom the Arabs had preserved no traditions.

At 7 p.m. we had our first halt, off-saddled, supped

off a tin of soup, and then lay down to sleep for a few hours in the delicious air of the desert. At 11 p.m. we were off again, and rode on until six o'clock on the following morning (May 9), when we gave our animals a five hours' rest. At 11 a.m. we were in the saddle once more, for it is more comfortable to ride through the mid-day heat than to lie down on burning sand exposed to the rays of a vertical sun. The scenery would have been monotonous had it not been for the illusory, ever-changing landscapes that surrounded us. Never before have I travelled through such a succession of mirages. All day long we rode across an enchanted land, wherein we could not be certain that anything was real save the sand immediately beneath us. On the horizon extended ranges of pleasant hills from which rivers flowed in broad belts of rippling blue. We saw lakes of breaking waves on whose shores palms and long grasses bent quivering beneath a strong wind, whose refreshing breath was unfelt by us; for the air was quite still this day, and the breeze was but a mockery like the water. Often, too, a long sea horizon stretched before us. We seemed to be descending to a wild coast, with deep rock-enclosed fiords, sandy dunes, far-jutting promontories; while many islets were scattered over the calm sea. I think this was the hottest day I have ever known. Even the Beduin appeared to feel it, and my black Sudanese servant fell ill. It would have been at least 120° in the shade, possibly a good deal more, had there been any shade; but there was none;

and what it was in the sun I cannot say; but I know that the water in my water-bottle attained so high a temperature that it hurt the back of one's hands when poured upon them.

We were now in quite open desert, and we rode on hour after hour over the scorching sand, through the windless air, dry and burning as the breath of a furnace; we rode on between the glare of the sky and the glare of the sand, longing only that the sun—which seemed that day so long in setting—would sink below the horizon and leave us in the cool, dark night. And at last, to our relief, the sun did set; then the mirages faded round us; the lakes and rivers shrunk up; the palms and long grasses sank into the earth, and we saw the land in all its true desolate nakedness, a dead flat waste of sand extending to the horizon in every direction, lonely and lifeless; impressing the imagination as being far more utterly and appallingly desert a region than the wilderness we had traversed between Korosko and Murat, where picturesque, rocky hills ever confine the view and prevent one from realizing, as one does here, the fulness of the desolation. Even before the sun had disappeared we unsaddled our camels and prepared our supper. How one enjoys the evening halt in the desert at the close of such a day's journey as this had been! After sunset the radiation rapidly reduces the temperature of the heated sand and air, a cool breeze generally springs up, and one sleeps the most refreshing of sleeps as one lies on one's blanket under the starlit

sky, breathing the purest air in the world. Here we had a long halt. We sent on the slower baggage animals with three of the guides and my servant at midnight. But we Englishmen remained where we were with two of the guides until 2 a.m., as we knew that by trotting on with our camels we could soon overtake the rest of the party. We acted wrongly, as will be seen, in separating ourselves from our baggage in this portion of the desert.

Resuming our journey, therefore, at 2 a.m. on May 10, we rode on till daybreak, trotting most of the time, and were surprised that we had not yet overtaken our companions. I set myself to discover how these Arabs find their way on a dark night in the open desert, and I came to the conclusion that they leave a good deal to chance. By day they direct their course from one conspicuous landmark to another: by night they travel on in what they know to be more or less the right direction, hoping at dawn to sight some familiar rock or other mark, and so verify their position. Their method, in short, is a sort of happy-go-lucky dead reckoning. They may occasionally use the sun by day and the stars by night as their compass; but they are undoubtedly apt to rely a good deal on the sagacity of their camels; for I noticed that the guides not infrequently slept soundly while riding at night, leaving their animals to go as they liked. It seems that when once you have put one of these "ships of the desert" on his course you can safely indulge in snatches of slumber; for the camel requires little

steering, and will plod on in the direction to which you have turned his nose for a considerable time without any guidance—that is, if you are in the true desert, where no temptation assails him; for if he happens to perceive some sharp dry thorns, a bit of wood, or other such delicate morsel by the roadside, he will without scruple turn off to secure it, and then complacently march on in an entirely wrong direction.

At daybreak we expected to find the tracks of our other camels, which our guides confidently asserted were still in front of us; but though we rode off for some distance to both right and left of our road, not a recent camel print could we find anywhere. Our guides explained that the road here on the open desert was anywhere one pleased, so that the camels might be far off, on either side of us; but not so far off, they added, as to be out of sight if we were in line with them, unless they had lost their way. We trotted on, ever scanning the horizon, already quivering in mirage, in all directions. Once we saw what appeared to be some moving black specks to the southward, which we all took to be our companions, but on riding down upon them we found these to be some little rocks. The sun rose higher, and all around us once more flowed the blue waters of the mirage. On this, as on the previous day, there was no wind, and we realized that we had again before us twelve hours of as intense heat and fierce sun glare as can be experienced in any region of the earth.

We were now certain that our men were not in front of us. Either we had passed them without seeing them in the night, and they were still behind, or they had lost themselves. For some time there had been visible in front of us a distant range of high, rugged hills, which our guides told us we should have to leave on our right hand. On approaching this range we perceived to the north of us, and apparently close to, an isolated pyramid of rock, about 200 ft. in height, with an almost perpendicular cliff facing the west which would afford shade until mid-day. We turned off our road and went to this rock with the intention of there awaiting our missing companions, or of making it our rendezvous while we rode off to scour the desert in search of them. When we set out for it the rock seemed a few hundred yards distant. We rode towards it for half-an-hour, when it appeared to shrink in size and to be quite five miles off; then after a while it loomed large in front of us again; but we put no faith in its appearance, and would not even assume that it had any real existence at all—for the desert was now full of ghosts—until we came at last into absolute contact with its black crags, and were resting under its friendly shade.

We refreshed ourselves with a frugal breakfast of biscuit and draughts of brackish Murat water, now of a rich brown colour and having a strong flavour of the goat-skins. I then walked along the foot of the cliff, seeking a way by which to scale its side

and attain some point commanding an extensive view over the desert, whence I might be able to distinguish our lost caravan. On turning a spur of the hill before commencing the ascent I saw, lying on the sand before me, a human skull, and then, close to it, leaning against a rock, a Martini-Henry rifle. On looking round I perceived, just above me, crouching in the shadow of a rocky ledge, the skeleton of a man. He was on his back, his limbs drawn up, his fists clenched, as he had died there in the agony of thirst. He had evidently lain there for a long time, and his head had fallen off. On examining the rifle, which he must have carefully placed in the position in which I found it, I saw that it was in good condition; there was no rust on the metal, and the lock was in working order; but the wooden stock had been bleached white, and all the varnish had been eaten off by the sun. It was an Egyptian Government-rifle, but there was nothing to show that the man had been a soldier. There were no boots, cap, belt, or traces of uniform to be seen near him—nothing, indeed, save a ragged piece of white linen. It was difficult to conjecture what this solitary man could have been doing here alone, quite sixty miles from the nearest water. It was evident that we were the first to take shelter under this lonely rock since he had lain himself down there to die; for no passing native would have failed to carry away with him the Martini-Henry, a valuable article on this frontier. We took the rifle back with us to Wady Halfa, and as it was of

course numbered, its history was soon traced. It had been served out to a man in the 7th Egyptian battalion, who lost it two years ago, and who therefore had been made to replace it at his own expense. The skeleton may have been either that of a Dervish raider, or of one of the frontier rifle thieves who sell weapons to the enemy.

It was now eleven o'clock, and still nothing was to be seen of our men. There could no longer be any doubt about their being lost. We therefore rode to the southward in search of their tracks. At last one of our two keen-sighted guides, pointing to some black objects which appeared to be tossing on the waves of a distant lake, said with confidence, "Those are men on camels." And so indeed they proved to be when we got nearer, a small party riding unconcernedly through the blue waters of the mirage. We could not tell at first whether they were our own people, other travellers, or Dervish scouts; but it astonished us to find that, whoever they were, they were travelling in a southerly direction, a route which would ultimately bring them out on the Nile between Dongola and Abu Hamed. Then they perceived us and halted; and riding up we soon distinguished the familiar faces of our three Beduin and my Sudanese servant. When we joined them they were so glad to find themselves with us again that they did not in the least mind the severe rating they received for having thus wasted six hours of our time. They had completely lost their way and were evidently getting alarmed, so

that our arrival with the other two guides must have been a great relief to them—and, indeed, what can be more terrifying to the imagination than to realize that one is hopelessly lost amid these burning sands, the scanty supply of water in the leaky skins ever diminishing?

At 3 p.m. we were all off again, and soon struck the proper track. Scared by their recent experience, the other men refused to separate from us, and when we trotted all hurried on after us. We halted from sunset to 11 p.m., and then set out for our final march. Our guides told us that we could ride in to Halfa in seven hours, so we travelled fast all night, and on the following morning, May 11, saw before us the broad belt of rocky ridges and defiles which borders the Nile. Here our guides took a wrong pass; and when, at last, we saw before us the green fringe of palms which marks the river bank, it was discovered that we were many miles to the south of Wady Halfa. The result was that instead of reaching our destination in seven hours we did not get there till 10 a.m., after eleven hours' hard riding without a halt. Our weary camels made no attempt to bolt with us to the water, as they had done when nearing Murat. We had thus accomplished our journey of 128 miles in a little over 64 hours, which is good going when one is accompanied by baggage animals; and we should have got in eight hours sooner had we not lost so much time in hunting for our lost men on the

previous day and not taken the wrong pass when nearing the Nile.

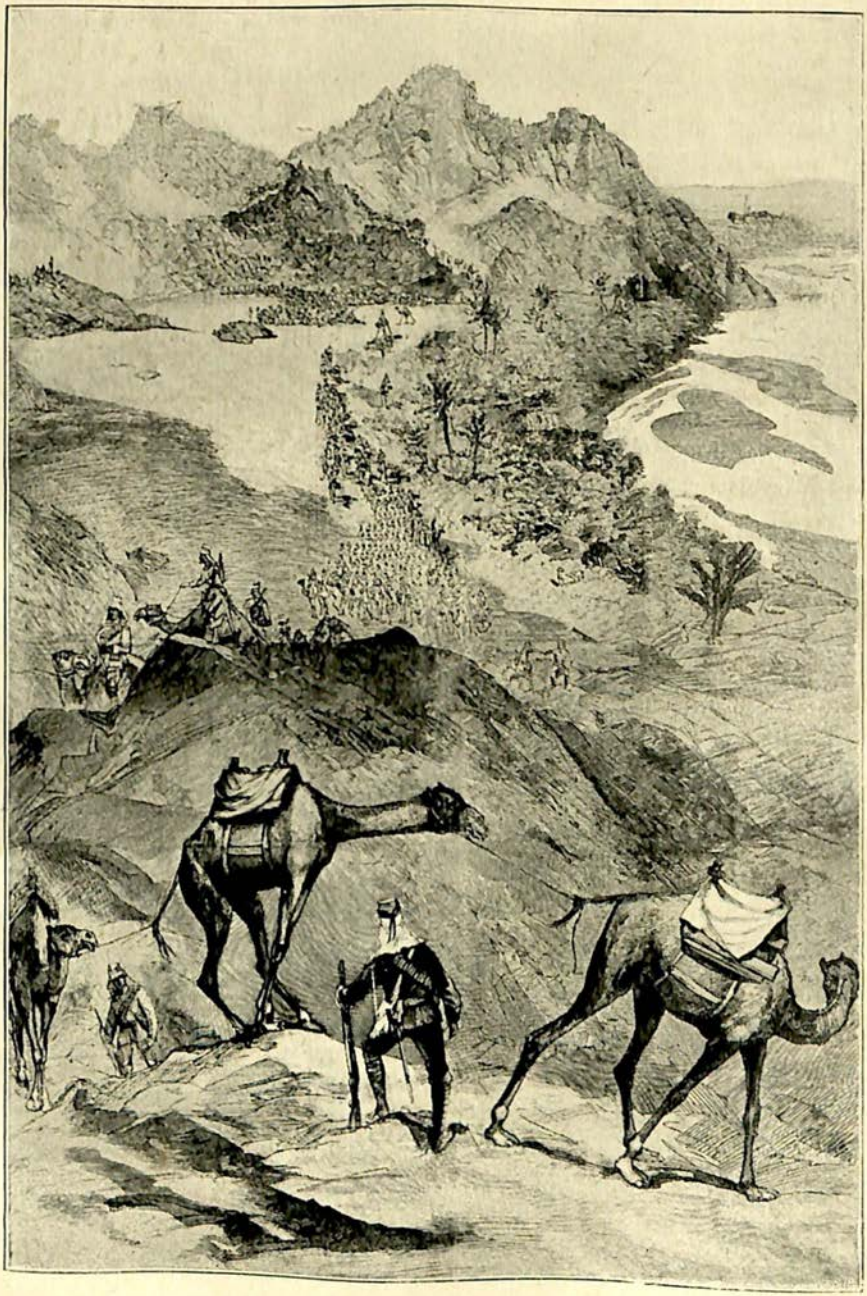
The first thing we did was to call on Major Wingate and learn all the news. Correspondents, we heard, have at last been permitted to accompany a convoy to Akasheh, but are not to stay there more than two days. It was interesting, too, for us to learn that our friend Abd-el-Azim's recent demonstration on the Nile has apparently alarmed the Khalifa, who has now despatched reinforcements to Abu Hamed. We met our friend Captain Mahmoud Bahgat, late commandant of Murat. He told us that the men of his Sudanese company, determined on beating the record march made by their Egyptian comrades, had marched with him from Murat to Korosko in 64 hours—that is, in one hour less than the time occupied on the outward journey by the men of the 15th battalion whom we had accompanied.

VIII

WADY HALFA, *May* 31.

I HAVE this morning returned from Akasheh, having thus followed the line of communications after all preparations have been practically completed and when an admirably organized system of transport is in full working order. Three months' supplies are now at Akasheh; by rail, river, and camel transport an unending stream of stores is ever pouring southward; no serious hitch or interruption ever occurs; and an army of about 10,000 men is ready to take the field—a marvellous result indeed to have accomplished within so short a time and under such difficult conditions, reflecting great credit on the British and native officers, who have been toiling with unflagging energy for the last ten weeks to such good purpose, and also on the Egyptian soldiers, who have, with such admirable spirit, performed the arduous duties imposed upon them—duties which would undoubtedly have been beyond the powers of any European troops.

Two other correspondents and myself, having sent our horses and camels on by road some days before, took train on the morning of May 23 for



CONVOYS PASSING THROUGH THE SONKI DEFILE ON THE WAY TO AKASHEH.

Moghrat Wells. The train was loaded with forage and other supplies, and a score or so of soldiers sitting in the trucks served as escort; not that the Dervishes are at all likely now to venture an attack on a train; each *khor* descending to the river is too well guarded. Some time back the enemy could have fallen on our line of communications and harassed us considerably with comparative ease; but they never availed themselves of their opportunity. The train stopped for a quarter of an hour at Sarras, no longer the important place it was when I last visited it. At that time the rail head was here, and Sarras was the head-quarters of the line of communication, to which supplies were brought by railway, thence to be forwarded south on camels; but since the railway has been extended thirty miles the troops have been pushed on to the front. The large fortified camp with its serried lines of tents, which lay beneath the Sarras fort, has disappeared, and 300 men only of the garrison battalion—fresh recruits and old reservists—now occupy the place. At Sarras the railway leaves the rocky and difficult banks of the sinuous Nile to strike across the desert to Akasheh. Water is procurable at two points on the line—the wells of Moghrat and the wells of Ambigol. We reached the former, forty-seven miles from Halfa, at midday, and found that we could proceed no further that day, as an engine had capsized in front and temporarily blocked the line. At Moghrat black rocks surround a sandy basin somewhat resembling that

of Murat Wells which I have described in a former letter, and the bitter water is found by digging to the depth of about twelve feet. Major Lewis was acting as commandant when we arrived, and had with him 200 men of the 8th battalion.

At eleven in the morning of May 24, the line being again clear, we took train to the railway camp, which on that day was about five miles short of Ambigol Wells. Though this camp is ever moving on as the railway progresses, it has an orderly and permanent appearance. There are here a number of tents and huts occupied by the young engineer officers and the men of the railway battalion engaged on the construction of the line, a congregation, too, of little shelters where dwell native camp-followers, black, brown, and yellow, all of whom must have put forward some reasonable pretext for being here, for water is scarce at Moghrat. That used for drinking purposes is mostly brought up by the train, and this is no place for idle mouths. Enterprising Greeks have, of course, found their way here, and their little stores and canteens ever accompany the shifting camps. Here we lunched with the Royal Engineer officers who are pushing on the construction of this railway. I may mention that the posts are frequent on this line of communication, and that at every one of these the British officers insisted on extending to us their kindly hospitality. The journey from Wady Halfa across the Belly of Rocks to Akasheh has been described as a terrible experience. For our part we found its hardships much

less severe than we had expected, for after riding for a few hours we were certain to find ourselves among friends. And here, even if one had not before met the men, how familiar to one were many of their names, officers who had distinguished themselves in former Egyptian campaigns and in many a frontier fight, such, for example as Major Lewis, commandant of Moghrat Wells when I arrived there, who had led his gallant Sudanese at the battle of Argin and elsewhere; Colonel Hunter, commandant at Ambigol, who headed his battalion, the 13th Sudanese, when it gallantly stormed the heights at Toski, on which occasion he was wounded; Major Macdonald, now in command at Akasheh, who led the 11th Sudanese in the same action. But it would occupy much space to record the former exploits of the frontier officers who will play their part in the coming campaign. On this frontier, as on that of India, one feels that one is living in a more wholesome moral atmosphere than elsewhere, away from petty things, among true men, the pick of our countrymen, indeed, of whom England may well be proud, and whose merits so very few Englishmen fully realize. Certain English papers, by the way, have recently attacked the Sirdar in most unfair fashion. In one journal, for example, Sir Herbert Kitchener is described as being unpopular with his officers and as a commander who cannot inspire confidence. I am personally acquainted with the majority of the officers engaged in this expedition, and I have no hesitation in saying that both the

above statements are absolutely false. Some very unkind things, too, I see, are being written about the Egyptian army. Captain Haggard attempts to show that even the Sudanese blacks are not to be relied on, and states that on one occasion black troops refused to obey his orders. Officers here who have often led these gallant blacks to victory are of a very different opinion. It must be remembered, too, that Captain Haggard writes of the Egyptian army as it was ten years ago, that he was never an officer in a black regiment, that the one occasion on which he saw a black battalion in action was at Ginnis. That the blacks then disobeyed some order of his is likely enough. In those days they only knew their own white officers, whom they would follow anywhere, and would not understand that a strange officer had any right to give them orders.

The railway could take us no further, so after lunch we mounted our horses and rode off to Ambigol. First we followed the railway, which on that day had been completed to a point three miles beyond the railway camp and about sixty-three miles from Wady Halfa. Here, guarded by detachments of men from the 7th battalion, hundreds of sturdy fellows were vigorously working on the line under the supervision of the British officers (a constant and careful supervision, for these men, though willing, are extraordinarily clumsy), laying sleepers and metals on the already-completed formation. From here we rode across a rough, stony

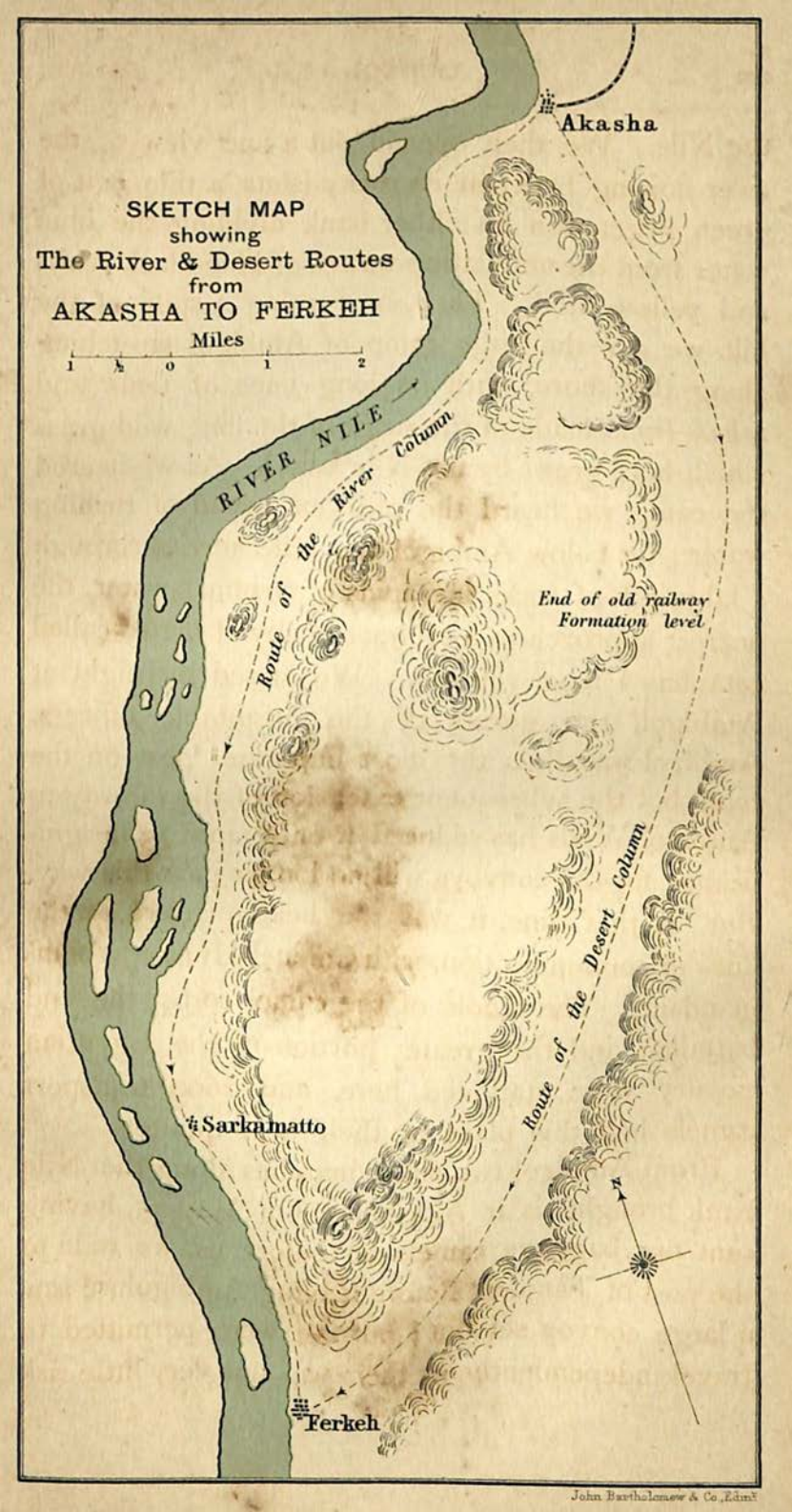
country, utterly desert, like all the country we had traversed since leaving the Nile. This portion of the road is the most exposed to Dervish attack; it is therefore well guarded, and all the *khors* affording access from the Eastern desert are frequently patrolled by cavalry. As we rode by we saw on many a commanding rock the Beduin friendlies posted, their lithe forms motionless, their white robes fluttering in the wind, as they watched the mouths of the distant defiles.

After riding a few miles we reached the summit of a ridge and saw another post before us—two forts and several tents crowning a rocky height which rose above the barren waste of sand and stones. This was Ambigol Wells—a name familiar to many Englishmen, for it was here in the beginning of December 1885, that thirty men of the Berkshire and West Kent Regiments, under Captain Ferrier, most gallantly defended the post for three days against an overwhelming Dervish force until relieved by General Butler. While crossing the plain below the present forts we saw the ruins of the old fort which the British soldiers held on that occasion, and the sites of our former camps were indicated by the multitude of empty meat-tins which still lay upon the sands. Here, as at Moghrat, bitter water is found at a depth of twelve feet; the garrison consisted of 150 men of the garrison artillery under an Egyptian commandant.

We now left the railway formation and rode down a wild defile for about four miles in the direction of

the Nile. We then opened out a fine view of the river flowing between its rocky islets, a thin belt of green vegetation on either bank dividing the blue water from the undulating wastes of blue-black rocks and yellow sand. Then, on turning a spur of the hill, we saw the large camp of Ambigol stretching along the shore, with its long lines of tents and *tokuls* (huts made of the straw of the long wild grass which here grows by the Nile bank). As we neared the camp we heard the pleasant sound of rushing water; for below Ambigol the Nile hurries through a labyrinth of rocks in rapids of foaming water, the nearest approach to a cataract of any of the so-called cataracts I have yet seen. We passed the night at Ambigol, the guests of the hospitable officers. Ambigol was then the most important post on the road, but the subsequent extension of the railway to Ambigol Wells has reduced it once more to insignificance, for the convoys will no longer pass this way. But, at that time, it was the head-quarters of the lines of communication, with Colonel Hunter as commandant. The whole of the camel corps, the 2nd battalion, and the greater portion of the Egyptian cavalry were stationed here, and 2600 transport camels had this place as their head-quarters.

From Ambigol two short marches along the Nile bank brought us to Akasheh. On May 25, having sent our baggage camels on before us, we rode to the post of Tanjur. Before leaving Ambigol we saw a large convoy set out; but we were permitted to travel independently, as there was but very little risk



John Bartholomew & Co., Edinr.

of our encountering Dervishes. On our journeys to and from Akasheh we carefully avoided the convoys; for it is far pleasanter to canter on alone than to travel at a slow walk enveloped by the suffocating clouds of dust raised by the feet of many hundreds of tramping camels. This portion of the Nile valley is very picturesque. The river itself often broadens in lake-like expanses studded with islets. I was astonished to find a much more abundant wild vegetation on the banks than I had seen anywhere else in this parched country. Long grass, affording good pasture, covered the soil left by the shrinking Nile, and close to the water it was beautifully green. Here and there grew date-palms, and we rode through groves of trees, camel-thorn, and acacias, some of considerable size. But it was all wild growth, cultivation there was none; though years ago, before Mahdism fell as a blight upon the land, there were villages on these shores inhabited by peaceful peasants; here, as in the settled regions lower down, was heard the perpetual moan of the *sakiyehs;* the irrigated fields returned rich crops, and groves of date-palms, now cut down, shaded the approaches to each hamlet. This has now for long been the debatable land, whereon no man dare dwell, the deserted frontier belt between Mahdism and the territory under the rule of Egypt protected by the frontier force. But, though no men now occupy the land, the vegetation sustains numbers of wild creatures. Gazelles, goats, and sand grouse abound here, while all the trees are full of singing

birds. Though traversing an uninhabited country the road was far from lonely; we met frequent return convoys, cavalry patrols, and now and then overtook a small party of travellers, for example, a couple of Greeks marching up to Akasheh, driving before them donkeys laden with tobacco and other luxuries to be retailed at a good profit to the soldiery. We, of course, occasionally passed dead camels on our way; but the loss of these beasts has been remarkably small considering how many thousands of them are engaged in the transport of supplies. We passed the night within the zariba at Tanjur, at which post half of the 4th battalion were stationed. Just before reaching camp we saw lying high and dry on the sand by the water's edge the hull of a wrecked steamer. This was the *Gizeh*, which ran on a rock and foundered at the commencement of the last Nile expedition.

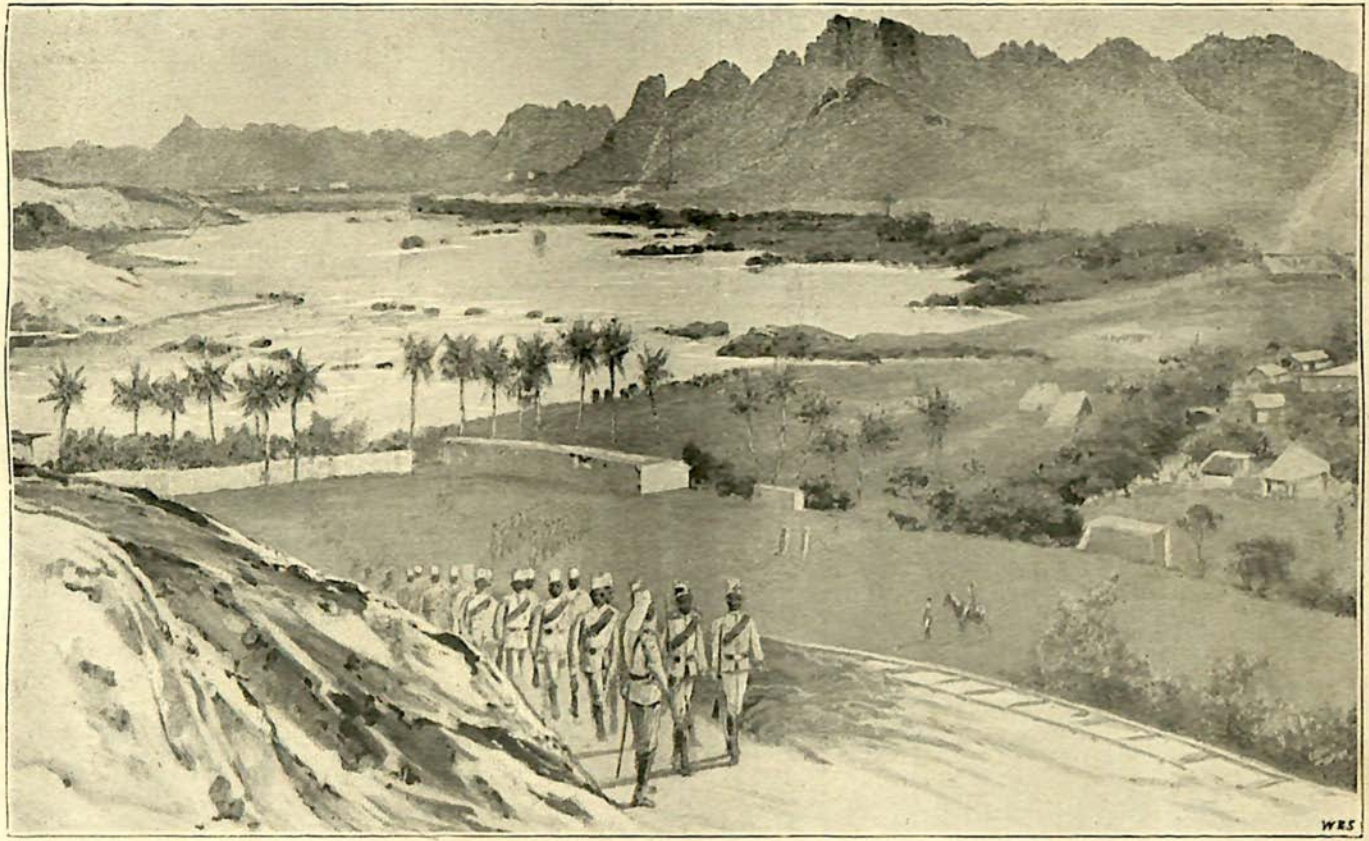
On May 26 we rode into Akasheh. We passed three posts on the way—Alemula, where we found half of the 4th battalion and two squadrons of cavalry, Sonki, and Okmeh, each guarded by a half battalion of infantry and a troop of cavalry. Beyond Alemula we crossed two steep rocky ridges by a good road that has been carried in zigzag across these difficult places. I have already pointed out that all the preparations for this campaign were completed in a remarkably short space of time; not the least creditable performance was that of the engineers who so rapidly converted the rough track from Sarras to Ambigol into what is now an excellent

road. We reached Akasheh in time to dine at the 12th battalion mess; and that night, as we bivouacked under some palm-trees by the river side, a most disagreeable dust-storm sprang up, so that we found ourselves in a very grimy condition on the following morning. The first thing I saw when I awoke at dawn and commenced to rub the sand out of my eyes was a party of six blacks, clad in the Mahdi uniform, passing by me under a guard of soldiers. These, I afterwards ascertained, were men of the Nubawi tribe, a people who live in the mountains of the Dar Nuba district to the south of El Obeid. The Nubawi make good soldiers, and from them comes the best material in the Khedive's black battalions. These men had deserted from the Khalifa's forces that night, and leaving their rifles behind them had contrived to reach one of our outposts. On the following day five of them enlisted in the 11th Sudanese battalion; the sixth man was medically unfit. It is likely that now there will be a good many more of these desertions.

We found four black battalions—the 9th, 11th, 12th, and 13th—at Akasheh. Here, too, was the English Maxim battery of four guns, seven Krupp mountain guns, three Nordenfeldts, and one squadron of cavalry. The defence of Akasheh is divided into three sections—right, left, and central—each with its fort and blockhouses outside its fortified camp. For the defence of each of the three sections a battalion commander is responsible. Akasheh is anything but a strong military position; it is

enclosed by rugged hills full of defiles, enabling an enemy to approach unseen and under cover. When Akasheh was first occupied it would not have been difficult for the Dervishes to rush our camp at night, and even now they could make it uncomfortable for us if they chose. By daylight Akasheh is secure enough, being safeguarded by a well-organized system of cavalry patrols excellently carried out.

We had obtained permission to stay at Akasheh for two days only, so set out on our return journey to Halfa on May 28; but before doing so we were spectators early that morning of a most interesting sham fight and attack on Akasheh. At 6 a.m. Major Macdonald paraded the four black battalions and the Maxim battery. The troops were marched up one of the defiles behind the camp, crossed the rocky heights to the left, and then descended another *khor* which debouches on the sandy plain behind Akasheh. I rode with them, and noticed that the various manœuvres were admirably executed by these well-trained Sudanese. There was a wonderful dash in all they did. The fighting formation which is best adapted for warfare in this country, and which will probably be employed throughout the campaign, was practised on this occasion. This formation has two advantages; it enables the troops to form square with ease and rapidity in case of sudden attack, and it also, by not extending the fighting line too much, enables an officer to keep his men well under control—an essential matter when one is dealing with these



VIEW FROM THE FORT OF AKASHEH.

excitable Sudanese. Thus, for a time, the troops advanced in columns of double companies; and when attacking the camp, each battalion (there are six companies in a Sudanese battalion) fought in a line of four companies with two companies in rear of the centre of the fighting line at the distance of one company. So that, if necessary, a square (or, to speak with mathematical accuracy, an oblong) could be formed with the utmost rapidity by wheeling inwards the two flank companies. Finally the four battalions made a brilliant bayonet charge. It was a sight worth seeing, and we may see its like in grim earnest soon. On came the eager blacks with a loud yell, as is their wont, waving their rifles as if they were spears, until they came near the imaginary enemy, when they lowered their rifles again and charged home with so furious a rush that the Dervishes will have to be good men indeed if they can withstand the like.

Of the journey back I need say little. We left Akasheh in the afternoon and passed the night at Alemula. The following day, May 29, we rode to Ambigol Wells, to which post the railway camp and rail head had now been advanced. My companion and myself (the third correspondent had to accompany our little caravan on a camel, as his horse had fallen lame) cantered on by a short cut through the defiles, not used by the convoys, which brought us out on the old railway line a few miles south of Ambigol Wells. While we were in the middle of this desert road we met Major Burn Murdoch at the

head of a strong cavalry patrol. He told us that, while traversing a *khor* that morning, they had found the skeleton of a man with his head resting on a Koran. The remains are supposed to be those of a famous holy man who was murdered hereabouts by the Dervishes some years ago.

During this journey we were much nearer the Dervishes than we imagined, and it appears that as we two rode along, feeling quite secure, up these desert *khors*, a strong party of the enemy were encamped in a defile but a few miles off; it was by good luck only that we did not fall in with them. Our camel-drivers who followed us indeed perceived a number of men on a distant ridge and were much alarmed. We now know that 140 Dervishes were in the neighbourhood of Ambigol Wells at that very time. Later on, at midnight, they were within two miles of the wells. Their presence was unsuspected until they suddenly opened a heavy fire; but on whom they were firing is not yet known. Cartridges are too scarce and valuable in the Khalifa's dominions to be wasted in idle noise. On the following morning a cavalry patrol followed their tracks for some way, verified their numbers, and found 150 expended cartridges lying on the ground. The Dervishes had crossed the desert by a route that leads direct from Dongola. This is all that is known at present of this mysterious demonstration on the part of the enemy.

When we came to the old railway we found the earthworks in excellent condition; the metals and

sleepers had not been removed; but the line, having been first broken into sections by the Dervishes, had been turned over bodily, so that the sleepers lay on the top of the rails. Some of these sections were several hundreds of yards in length, so that it must have required a great number of men working in perfect unison to have capsized such heavy masses. The metals have probably been twisted by this operation, and it may be impossible to make use of them in the construction of the new line. At Akasheh great lengths of the old railway have been turned over in the same way.

At Ambigol Wells we now found a large camp and Major Lewis, who had left Moghrat, acting as commandant. A train starting at night brought us into Halfa at dawn yesterday morning. We have been busy ever since making arrangements for transport, purchasing rations for ourselves and animals for many weeks, and getting all ready. For the long-awaited and welcome order has been given at last. The Sirdar and his staff will proceed to Akasheh to-morrow or the day after, and the correspondents are now free to go to the front. We shall all set out on Tuesday morning. There are good reasons to think that an advance on Ferkeh will be made at once; but I can say nothing with certainty.

IX

CAMP NEAR FERKEH, *June* 10.

TOWARDS the end of May there was a final rush of military preparation at Wady Halfa, and when it became known that the Sirdar and his staff were leaving Halfa on June 1 to establish head-quarters at Akasheh, we had little doubt that an immediate advance was to be made. But it was highly expedient—as will become apparent when I tell the story of the battle of Ferkeh—that complete secrecy should be maintained as to the date and nature of the intended operations; the Khalifa's spies were known to be in our camp in the guise of camel-drivers, servants, or what not, ready to carry every useful scrap of overheard conversation to their master's ears. With so much preparation in progress, with so many rumours afloat, one would have thought it impossible to conceal the truth; but, as a matter of fact, this was most successfully done, and the Dervishes at Ferkeh, as was proved later, had no suspicion of the trap that was being laid for them. Only staff officers, including, of course, brigade commanders, were cognizant of the Sirdar's plans, and it was not

till the last moment—a few hours, indeed, before we marched out of Akasheh on June 6 to attack the Dervish post—that the majority of officers concerned became aware that the time for advance had come at last.

On June 2 correspondents, all of whom were then in Halfa, obtained permission to proceed to Akasheh. On that day the train was very crowded. The splendid blacks of the 10th battalion, who had just arrived from Suakin, though closely packed in the open trucks in a fashion that would have been intolerable to any European troops, appeared to be fairly comfortable and quite contented throughout the long journey across the hot desert. The only two passenger carriages on the train were also crowded with British and Egyptian officers and correspondents. But some of us travelled up more comfortably on the following day, June 3, when there was more room on the train. We left Halfa in the midst of a sand-storm of very unusual severity. The wind blew with great fury, driving the sand before in dense, suffocating clouds. This storm lasted for some time, and would have proved dangerous to troops on the march in the desert. On nearing Sarras we were astonished to see on either side of us, scattered over the desert, lakes of water, while many streams wound among the black boulders and yellow sand-hills. It was no mirage, for the rare rain had fallen, and when it does rain here it rains very heavily. It was fortunate that the storm was local, for had it filled the desert wells

the Dervishes would have gained a great advantage, and would have been enabled to harass our line of communication. One result of the rain was temporarily to convert the climate into the most unpleasant one I have, I think, ever experienced in any part of the world. The sodden earth gave forth a hot steam, and as the temperature had been high this day—120° in the shade, possibly—the vaporous air was singularly oppressive. It was no longer the supportable dry heat of the desert (we have had 128° in the shade at Akasheh and yet not felt very uncomfortable), but a damp yet intense heat, such as is unknown in the most stifling climate of tropical swamp lands.

We reached the present terminus of the railway at Ambigol Wells at midnight, and were enabled to enjoy a few hours' sleep on the sand, and on the following morning we rode straight into Akasheh. Since I had ridden down the road a few days previously the aspect of our line of communication had considerably changed. The troops had been pushed on to the front, and I found Tanjur, Alemula, and the other posts held by small parties of Egyptian infantry only. But from Okmeh, where the Sirdar had established his head-quarters, a long camp of troops and transport extended all the way to Akasheh, four miles distant. On reaching Akasheh correspondents were recommended to hold themselves in readiness to advance with the troops at a moment's notice, and at last, on June 6, we were informed that the field force would march that

night on to Ferkeh and attack the Dervish position on the coming dawn.

An explanation of the object of this advance and of the plan of attack will render more clear my description of what followed. The Intelligence Department, with Major Wingate as its able head and Slatin Pasha as second, has kept itself singularly well informed as to all the designs and movements of the enemy. I have before me, as I write, a sketch of the Dervish camp and a long note on the organization of the Dervish forces at Ferkeh, both compiled from the statements of deserters and of secret agents in the enemy's country. What we discovered after the battle of Ferkeh proved this information to have been accurate even down to small details. It was known that the Dervishes of the Dongola province were concentrated at Ferkeh under Hamuda as Emir-in-chief. Under him were no fewer than fifty-seven leading Emirs, whose names had been communicated to our Intelligence Department. They had been specially sent down by the Khalifa to menace the frontier, and among them were some of the most notorious Baggara and Jaalin raiders, the scourge of the frontier, cruellest and most bloodthirsty of brigand chiefs, whose names are words of terror down the Nile valley, the pitiless ministers of the Khalifa's will. Those at home who entertain a sentimental sympathy for these ruffians should have visited a Nile-side village after a raid and seen the horribly mutilated victims of their fiendish cruelty.

It was the object of the Sirdar to surprise Ferkeh and secure the whole of these leaders. To do this would be to inflict a crushing blow on the Khalifa's cause and to cripple the defence of the Dongola province. Had the Emirs suspected his intention they would probably have retired, as the force under their command at Ferkeh numbered about 3000 only. This valuable prize would have slipped his grasp had he not devised an admirable plan, which was as admirably carried into execution, and had not the closest secrecy been observed. As it happily turned out, the surprise was complete; the large majority of the Emirs were killed, others remain on our hands as prisoners, and only some half-dozen or so succeeded in escaping to carry news of the disaster to Dongola. The Sirdar, therefore, hurried on his preparations; but rightly made no movement until he had collected a sufficiency of supplies for many weeks at Akasheh, for it was his object not only to surprise Ferkeh, which he could have done some time ago, but to stay at Ferkeh when he got there, and even to push on to Suarda and permanently occupy that place if he should think proper to do so.

Ferkeh is sixteen miles distant from Akasheh. The following is the outline of the Sirdar's plan of attack:—The main body of the troops, under his own command, were to leave Akasheh on the evening of the 6th, bivouac near Sarkamatto Signal Station, three miles from Ferkeh, and at 4.30 a.m. on June 7 deploy and attack the Dervish position.

In the meanwhile another column, under Major Burn Murdoch, was to follow a desert route, which, leaving the river at Akasheh, follows the old railway formation for some distance, crosses the desert, and rejoins the Nile valley half-a-mile to the south of the Dervish camp, thus enabling the enemy's position to be turned. This column was to occupy a position on the heights east of Ferkeh village at 4.30 a.m. and then co-operate, as laid down in the orders, with the river column.

The river column was composed of the following troops :—An infantry division of three brigades, under the command of Colonel Hunter, of which the 1st Brigade, under the command of Major Lewis, consisted of the 3rd and 4th Egyptian battalions and the 10th Sudanese battalion; the 2nd Brigade, under Major Macdonald, consisted of the 9th, 11th, and 13th Sudanese battalions; and the 3rd Brigade, under Major Maxwell, consisted of the 2nd, 7th, and 8th Egyptian battalions, with the 2nd and 3rd Field Batteries, two Maxim guns, and a field hospital—about 7000 men in all. Each man carried two days' rations and ninety rounds of ammunition.

The desert column was thus composed:—A cavalry brigade of seven squadrons, under Major Burn Murdoch; the camel corps (670 rifles), under Captain Tudway; the 12th Sudanese battalion (717 of all ranks), under Major Townshend; No. 1 Battery (Horse Artillery), under Captain Young; two Maxim guns, under Captain Laurie; and a

detail of the medical corps—about 2100 in all. Major Burn Murdoch was instructed to pursue the enemy vigorously with the cavalry and camel corps, should the Dervishes endeavour to escape along the river bank, and unless he met with serious resistance he was to follow up the victory by occupying Suarda, which is about thirty miles beyond Ferkeh, at which place the enemy were known to have collected supplies.

The routes to be followed by the two columns were well known to several British officers. The desert column was most skilfully guided on a very dark night across the trackless desert by Captain Broadwood, second in command of the cavalry; while the river route, which at some points quits the Nile and crosses the desert in order to avoid the rugged hills by the river side, had been carefully reconnoitred on June 1 by Colonel Hunter and seven of the staff officers. They rode until they were in sight of the Ferkeh camp, and returned without being discovered by the enemy. They were enabled after this experience to make such arrangements for the march that there was no confusion in the river column, despite the darkness of the night. All the correspondents accompanied the river column, which set out at an earlier hour than was at first intended. We advanced in column order, the 1st Brigade leading. Then came the following order:—Two Maxims, two field batteries, the 2nd Brigade, the 3rd Brigade, the field hospital, and half a battalion of the 3rd Brigade as rear guard.

So large a body of men could proceed but slowly and with frequent short checks, for in places we had to cross boulder-strewn slopes and traverse narrow and rugged *khors*. The darkness fell as we were creeping across the desert in a long sinuous stream. There was no moon, but occasionally we caught vague but beautiful glimpses of the palm-bordered Nile dimly gleaming in the starlight. The column advanced so silently that when it was crossing sandy ground one could hear no sound from it if one were but twenty paces off, and a straggler would find himself immediately lost. A few of us indeed had this experience. Every precaution was taken to prevent the enemy from having any notice of our advance. No bugle sounds were employed during the march, no smoking was allowed, and orders were given that if the enemy were met with they should be dealt with by the bayonet only, and that no firing should take place during the night except under the orders of Colonel Hunter. The head of the column reached the bivouac at 9 p.m. The troops as they came up halted with as broad a front as the ground allowed, being formed in columns of double companies, each brigade having two of its battalions abreast of each other with its third battalion behind. Outposts were now set and water-bottles were filled in silence from the adjacent river. By a quarter past one the whole force had bivouacked. This night march of twelve miles was a very creditable performance, when the obscurity of the night and the difficulty of the ground are taken

into account, and it must be remembered, moreover, that the condition of absolute silence made it no easy task for the men to grope their way back through the darkness to their respective positions after they had clambered down the steep river bank to fill their water-bottles. There would have been some confusion, I imagine, in these circumstances, had this been a European force. It was about midnight when I halted somewhere (I knew not with which brigade, but I could see that the men were preparing to bivouac), dismounted, lay on the sand with my horse standing by my side, and slept until the signal was given to resume the march. The enemy were certainly not on the alert. We were now but three miles or so from their camp, and were bivouacking on the very ground where their goats and sheep were sent to graze each day in charge of Nubawi blacks. Yet they had no suspicion of our proximity, and we were not disturbed, as we might well have been, during our halt in the inky blackness of that night. On our way we had slowly progressed over difficult broken ground, through a narrow defile, where the Dervishes might easily, secure themselves, have opened a galling fire from above upon our line of march. So far we had good reason to congratulate ourselves on the success of the enterprise.

After what appeared to be a very short time the men were aroused and I was awakened by the gentle stir of the preparations for the march. I afterwards ascertained that the head of the 1st Brigade led the

advance at 2.15 a.m., while the tail of the column left the bivouac only twenty minutes later, a smart bit of work indeed on such a dark night as this was. I rode along the column and found the 1st Brigade leading with the 10th battalion at its head, the 2nd and 3rd Brigades following. At 4.30, when the first faint gleam of dawn appeared in the east, the 1st and 2nd Brigades deployed in turn into fighting formation, which was that I described in a former letter as being the formation which would most probably be put into practice throughout the campaign. Two battalions of each brigade formed the fighting line, each battalion having two out of its six companies behind in support, thus enabling a square to be formed rapidly in case of a Dervish rush. The fighting line of the 1st Brigade was composed of the 10th and 3rd battalions.

But after we had advanced but a short distance this formation had to be changed. A spur of the Jebel Ferkeh stretches out towards the river, so narrowing the plain that only one battalion can advance in line. The ground, too, between the hill and the river is difficult and broken. So from this point the 10th battalion led in line, the 3rd battalion being edged off towards the river on the right. The 1st Brigade was followed by the 2nd Brigade, the 9th battalion leading, the other two battalions marching in columns of route on the left flank.

I was riding with the 2nd Brigade when the action opened. The first shot was fired by the enemy

at 5 a.m. It appears that we had been seen by a party of camel men, who had ridden back to Ferkeh to announce our approach. The Dervishes would probably have attempted to escape to the south, seeing so overwhelming a force before them. But scarcely had they been made aware of the presence of the river column when the desert column under Major Burn Murdoch appeared on the hills behind them, outflanking them, for the arrival of both columns at the positions assigned to them had been most accurately timed. The Emirs, finding their retreat cut off, stood at bay and fought with the desperate bravery that has always distinguished them.

Immediately after the first shot had been fired by the enemy in front, still invisible from where I was standing, a brisk fire opened on our left, and on looking round I saw puffs of smoke hanging on the steep slopes of the Ferkeh mountains about 200 yards off. Here, high up the hill side, the enemy had an outpost, whose situation had already been communicated to our Intelligence Department by deserters, so this attack was not unexpected. Sheltered by the boulders of the mountain and the walls of an ancient tomb, an outpost of the enemy had lain in wait for us; their fire was fairly accurate, several of our men were hit, Captain Manifold's horse was shot under him, and the whistle of bullets told us we were under fire at last. It was curious to see this little party thus defying an army as it marched by, but later in the day I saw single

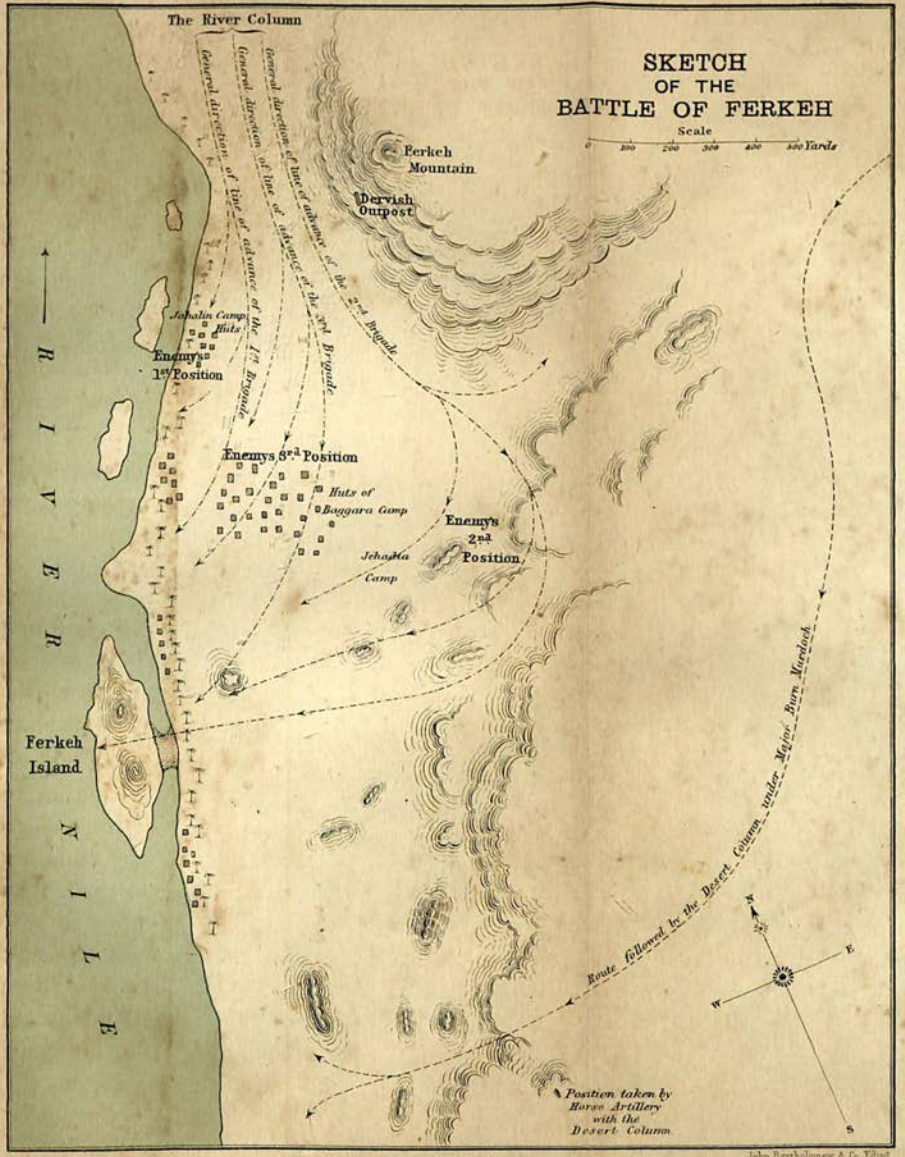
THE SECOND BRIGADE AT THE BATTLE OF FERKET.

men behind rocks doing the same, fighting on and refusing quarter until they were killed. A true Dervish when he makes up his mind to fight heeds not the numbers of his foe. We should have lost many men here from this enfilading fire had not this position been rapidly cleared. The 1st Brigade halted while the men of the 2nd Brigade concentrated a terrible fire on this outpost, the guns, too, opening fire upon it with shrapnel. A large proportion of this party must have been killed, and at last, when a number of men of the 9th Sudanese began to clamber up the cliffs to clear them out at the point of the bayonet, the remainder of the Dervishes took flight, ascending a narrow gully, many of them to be shot down by our riflemen before they could escape.

The column now turned the spur, the plain broadened as we advanced, and before us lay the village of Ferkeh and the Dervish position. The scene was impressive. On our left rose the dark masses of the Ferkeh mountains with a square summit shaped like that of Table Mountain. On our right flowed the Nile, bordered by pleasant groves of palms, among which were many huts and the ruins of the old Egyptian villages that had existed before the Khalifa's tyranny had made the country desolate. And there, too, in front of us, occupying every point of vantage, were the horsemen and infantry of the enemy. The disposition of the Dervish forces proved to be exactly as it had been reported to be by deserters. The camp of the

Jaalin was among the palms on the river bank. The Baggara camp was a large congregation of huts at some distance from the river. The Jehadia camp was still further away. The enemy had taken up three positions; the first position among the huts of the Jaalin camp; the second about a mile from us on our left flank, where a number of horsemen held the hills near the Jehadia camp; and the third among the huts of the Baggara camp.

Having reached more open ground, the 1st Brigade deployed into the same fighting formation as before, while the 2nd Brigade, also deploying, prolonged this line to the left with two battalions. The 1st Brigade was ordered to swing its left round and to attack the enemy's position 1, while the 2nd Brigade was to advance against position 2. This movement left a gap between the two brigades, which was filled up later on by the reserve (the 3rd) brigade, which was ordered to deploy and insert itself in the fighting line. The force then advanced with its left thrown well forward, and the action became general—on our side a rapid and well-directed volley fire, on the enemy's side an independent fire that was not to be despised, for our casualties were numerous. Our two batteries of field artillery, under Captain Peake and Ahmed Effendi Hafiz, wrought great execution with their shrapnel shell, as we perceived on the following day when inspecting the battle-field. The Maxim guns, too, under Captain Falkener, served by the thirty men of the Connaught Rangers, who are lent by


SKETCH
OF THE
BATTLE OF FERKEH
Scale
0 100 200 300 400 500 Yards
The River Column
General direction of line of advance of the 1st Brigade
General direction of line of advance of the 2nd Brigade
General direction of line of advance of the 3rd Brigade
Ferkeh Mountain
Dervish Outpost
Jehalin Camp Huts
Enemy's 1st Position
Enemy's 3rd Position
Huts of Baggara Camp
Jehalia Camp
Enemy's 2nd Position
Ferkeh Island
RIVER NILE
Route followed by the Desert Column under Major Burn Murdoch
Position taken by Horse Artillery with the Desert Column
N
E
W
S
John Bartholomew & Co. Edinr.

the army of occupation, were brought into action at different points with doubtless good effect.

One cannot be ubiquitous and be an eye-witness of every phase of even a small fight. For some time after the opening of the action I accompanied the 2nd Brigade, and saw the gallant Sudanese of the 9th, 11th, and 13th battalions at work, commanded respectively by Major Hackett Pain, Major Jackson, and Major Collinson. The brigade did good work this day. Its duty was to attack the enemy's position 2 and to cut off the enemy's retreat towards the Eastern desert. We saw before us the Dervishes occupying the heights in considerable force, and on one ridge was gathered a number of horsemen. The brigade advanced on these at a smart pace, over rough ground, crossing mountain spurs and ravines, and charging the enemy along the hill-tops. At frequent intervals they paused to pour in deadly volleys. The men were kept very well in hand, and, indeed, throughout this day, both Egyptian and Sudanese troops were as steady as if on parade. For some time the 9th led and bore the brunt of the battle; then the 11th formed on its right, while the 13th remained in reserve. No troops could long face so terrific a fire as was now directed upon the enemy; so many of them began to fall back. On the other hand, some of these indomitable warriors disdained to flee; they stubbornly remained in the *khors* and behind rocky ridges, coolly firing upon us until the Sudanese had fallen upon them and killed them. Quarter was

given to such as surrendered; but many of the wounded Dervishes acted, as is their wont, in such a manner as to forfeit all right to clemency. A man would lie still, as if dead, until one of his foemen had passed by—an English officer in preference—when he would raise his gun and shoot him treacherously in the back. I saw one wounded Dervish attempt this trick. I had ridden close to him and had looked down upon his upturned face, of which not a muscle quivered; he had been badly hit and I little suspected him of having any life left in him. But after I had proceeded some thirty yards I heard the report of a rifle behind me and the unmistakable whistle of a passing bullet intended either for myself or for another Englishman who was riding with me. On looking round I saw two black soldiers who had witnessed the incident run back to the wounded Dervish and empty their rifles into his body.

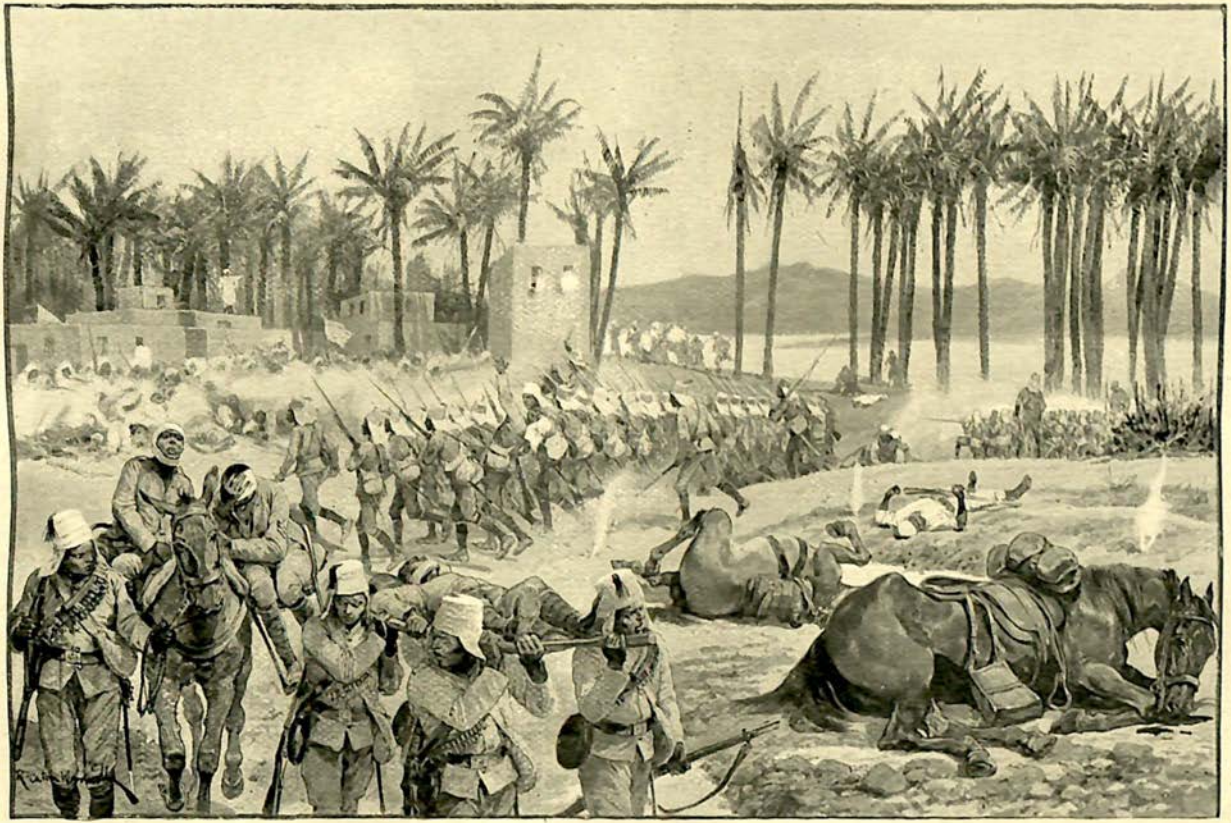
As the brigade pushed on and I passed over the ground from which it had driven the Dervishes, I was able to realize how effective had been the volley-firing of the Sudanese. The enemy's dead were scattered over the rocks, in some places, where small parties had stood firmly to the end, in groups of a dozen or more; many of the Dervish horses also had been killed or were wandering horribly wounded over the hills—the most pitiable of all the sights on a battle-field. In less than two hours Major Macdonald's brigade had swept round the amphitheatre of hills and cleared them of the

enemy; it then descended to the plain, still driving fugitives before it; and now the three brigades converged upon the village and the river bank near it, where the enemy were making their final stand.

While with the 2nd Brigade I had heard heavy firing to the west and south, showing that the 1st Brigade under Major Lewis and the force under Major Burn Murdoch's command were both hotly engaged. The 1st Brigade, composed of the 3rd Egyptian battalion, under Captain Selim, the 4th Egyptian battalion, under Captain Sparkes, and the 10th Sudanese battalion, under Captain Sidney, had some severe fighting, in which, I am very pleased to be able to say, the Egyptian troops, concerning whom so many disparaging things have been lately written, greatly distinguished themselves. I had already noted, in the course of the action, that the Egyptians were perfectly steady under fire, and they have always had the reputation for being so; but few gave them credit for possessing the dash they displayed on this occasion. The British officers who led them are rightly proud of their men, and I heard one to-day, who has seen much service, declare that he did not desire ever to have better troops under him. Such is the result of twelve years' careful training of the once despised fellahin by British officers. The Egyptian soldier has now been "blooded"; has gained confidence in his own powers; and already, since this victory, an increase of soldierly pride and spirit has made itself manifest in the ranks. It is now seven years since the last

battle was fought against the Dervishes at Toski; consequently, as six years is the term of conscription, not one of these Egyptians had been in action before. Of the Sudanese, who pass their lives under the colours, many, of course, had met the Mahdists frequently in fight.

I have already explained that the 1st Brigade had been ordered to advance on the enemy's position. Here, in the camp of the Jaalin, the Dervishes were in considerable force. Black riflemen, Baggara horsemen and spearmen, held a strong position among the huts and palm groves on the river bank. Some were inside the huts, while others lay behind the high banks along which the irrigation canals are carried. Deep trenches too, running through the camp at right angles to the river, made the position more difficult to attack. While, therefore, the 2nd Brigade was clearing the hills of the Dervishes, Major Lewis advanced on this position with his brigade in the following order:—The 4th battalion on the extreme right following the river bank; the 3rd battalion in the centre, and the 10th Sudanese battalion on the extreme left. On nearing the position the 10th circled its left round till its front became parallel to the river, and the enemy were thus shut in on two sides. The troops now fired volleys in rapid succession; at one time two battalions were concentrating all their fire on one small group of huts, and one old Baggara who was taken prisoner, one of the few survivors of this division of the enemy, declared that he had fought against us



THE FIRST BRIGADE ATTACKING THE JAHALIN CAMP AT THE BATTLE OF FERKET.

in many an action, but never since Abu Klea had he experienced so terrible a fire.

During the attack a body of desperate Baggara horsemen charged the 4th battalion, but the Egyptians, led by Captain Sparkes, whose horse was killed under him, stood firm, fired steadily and with precision, and repulsed the Dervishes with heavy loss. The men of the 3rd battalion, on the other hand, led by Captain Selim, charged another large party of Baggara with great spirit, completely routed them, and then hooted and derided the fleeing enemy. This is indeed a complete turning of the tables, for up to now the Dervishes have entertained a profound contempt for the fellahin troops, and would have disdained to turn their backs on them. The 4th and 10th battalions were both now on the flank of the enemy, numbers of whom attempted to escape through the high undergrowth to the river bank. The troops pressed on to the huts, from which some of the enemy were still opening fire upon them. Hut after hut was cleared, sometimes at the point of the bayonet, and there was some vigorous hand-to-hand fighting between the soldiers and parties of Dervishes who rushed out into the open determined to die fighting. Some of the huts were crowded with desperate Baggara, who fired on our troops to the end. Quarter was repeatedly offered to them, but they refused to surrender, and after the fight eighty corpses were found in one small hut alone. At last it was all over save for the occasional shots fired by wounded Dervishes who

had crawled away into hiding-places, to await the opportunity of slaying one more foeman ere they died. Each man who revealed his whereabouts after this fashion was speedily despatched by the soldiers; but the men were well in hand, and I neither saw nor heard of any wounded men being killed who had not acted treacherously. Within an hour's time the enemy's force in position was practically annihilated.

The 3rd, or reserve, Brigade, under Major Maxwell, composed of the 2nd, 7th, and 8th battalions, commanded respectively by Major Shekleton, Fathi Bey, and Youseff Bey Kiloussi, through no fault of its own, took little part in the fighting, as the enemy were already routed when these troops passed through the Baggara camp. By this time the 2nd Brigade had crossed the plain; and now the 2nd and 3rd Brigades, driving the enemy before them, converged to the south of the village, and faced the river, where the enemy made a final stand. Here, again, there was some hand-to-hand fighting, and a number of Dervishes were killed. About 100 of the enemy, bolting from cover to cover among the boulders, contrived to cross the now dry channel between Ferkeh island and the river bank. I accompanied a detachment from the 2nd Brigade which was sent to drive them out. Many of the Dervishes were killed fighting, but a number lay under the steep further bank of the island and offered no further resistance. These were called upon to surrender,

and soon they crawled out, bringing some women with them, whom they had sent to this place for safety at the commencement of the engagement. Many of these unfortunate people were blacks who had been compelled to fight the Government troops against their will. I witnessed a curious incident. No sooner did one of these prisoners appear above the bank, holding a woman by the hand, than one of our Sudanese soldiers gave a loud cry of joy, and would have rushed out of the ranks had he not been forced back into his place by an officer. He had recognized a near relation whom he had not seen for years. Such meetings are likely to be of frequent occurrence during this campaign. It is not likely that many of the enemy escaped across the river, for the western bank was patrolled by our irregulars, among others by the remnant of that gallant Kababish tribe which was almost annihilated by the Mahdists some years ago. We heard firing on the other side of the Nile in the course of this day, and it is supposed that our friendly Arabs were there also cutting off the enemy's retreat.

We afterwards ascertained that no less than 75 per cent. of our adversaries on this day were of the dominant and ferocious Baggara tribe. The remainder were blacks, Jaalin, and Jehadia, who were weary of the Khalifa's tyranny, had no desire to oppose us, and would have deserted to us had they dared do so. They had been placed in the forefront of the fight, and would have been instantly

put to death by the Baggara had they not fought us resolutely. Thus many of these poor people were necessarily killed by our men, a lamentable feature of this campaign, which, as I explained in a former letter, was anticipated. How to facilitate the desertion of these unfortunate slaves of the Khalifa and so save their lives is a problem which much perplexes our Intelligence Department.

Of the operations of the desert column I will say little in this letter, for Major Burn Murdoch pursued the fleeing enemy at the close of the action, and his splendid cavalry has not yet returned to Ferkeh. I have therefore had no opportunity yet of conversing with any one who accompanied this force, and, indeed, no one in Ferkeh could at present give a succinct account of what was done by it. But this we do know: the column reached its assigned position on the heights beyond Ferkeh punctually at the appointed time, and, outflanking the enemy, ensured his being caught in a complete trap. The Dervishes, driven before the 1st and 2nd Brigades, found their retreat cut off. I saw many of the enemy's mounted men, routed by our infantry, first gallop wildly to the south, and then, finding themselves headed by our cavalry, turn in despair and gallop back upon our lines to die. The foot men, too, were to be seen hurrying to and fro, seeking a way through the encircling enemy. Such as did escape to the south were vigorously pursued by the cavalry under Captain Broadwood, and quite 150 of the fugitive enemy were killed within a few

miles of Ferkeh. The Egyptians charged bravely, engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with parties of Dervishes standing at bay, and conducted themselves excellently throughout. In one of these conflicts Captain Legge, of the Egyptian cavalry, was wounded slightly, but cut down his assailant and two others. The horse artillery under Captain N. E. Young, which was attached to this force, did great execution, as, too, did the two Maxim guns under Captain Laurie.

The battle of Ferkeh opened at 5 a.m.; it was over at 7 a.m. It now only remained for Major Burn Murdoch to follow up the victory by pursuing the routed enemy. Both Major Murdoch and Captain Broadwood were most deservedly promoted on the field that morning before they set out in pursuit. For thirty miles along the Nile bank they followed the enemy, and occupied Suarda early the next morning, June 8. The Suarda Dervishes offered no resistance, but crossed the Nile in their boats, leaving their supplies in the hands of our men. Here again the horse artillery battery shelled the fugitives beyond the river with great effect. Thus we were in possession of Suarda within twenty-four hours of opening the attack on Ferkeh. But I must leave the account of Major Burn Murdoch's operations to another letter, after full details have come in. Suarda will now be garrisoned by the 12th and 15th battalions.

Thus ended this well-executed and highly successful military operation. As several of us remarked,

were it not for the slaughter, it had more the appearance of a well-planned field day than of a battle. Every movement was effected with precision, and confusion there was none. Our losses amounted to 20 killed and 80 wounded. The enemy cannot have lost fewer than 1000 men, including 40, at least, of their principal Emirs. Hamuda, the Emir-in-chief, and his three principal assistants, the Baggara Emirs Gebir, Yahia, and Wady, are among the slain. We captured 500 prisoners, a quantity of arms, ammunition, and Emirs' banners, a number of camels, goats, and horses, and considerable supplies of grain and forage.

It is impossible in this letter to specify the various excellent services of the officers who so admirably carried into execution the Sirdar's well-devised plan and led the Egyptian army to victory on this occasion. Colonel Hunter proved himself to be a most able commander of an infantry division, and it would be difficult to find a better leader of cavalry than Major Burn Murdoch. Captain Tudway, too, has already made his name as commander of the Camel Corps, and I shall have to describe his doings on this day when writing my letter on the operations of the desert column. The field hospital arrangements, too, were excellent, and great credit is due to the principal medical officer, Hunter Bey, and his staff. But one might easily dilate on the merits of all these carefully-selected young British officers —and there were upwards of 80 of them—who took their part in this action. There were, by the way,

quite 150 Englishmen present at the battle of Ferkeh, including the sergeant instructors, who were most useful in the fighting line, steadying the somewhat excitable blacks, and the 30 men of the Connaught Rangers, lent by the army of occupation, who were with the Maxim guns.

That so large a force as ours would defeat the Dervishes at Ferkeh was a foregone conclusion; but it was by no means so certain that we should succeed in catching all these important Emirs in a trap and slaughter so many of the Baggara. This day's terrible lesson should produce a great effect throughout the Sudan, and will probably save much bloodshed in the future. This time, at least, we have followed up a victory, and have shown the Dervishes that they will not, as heretofore, be permitted to defend a position until the last moment, and then escape unpursued, because a timid Government calls its army back. A crushing blow has been dealt; the Khalifa has now practically no forces and no leaders this side of Dongola. It will be interesting to learn—as we shortly shall learn—how the news of this disaster is received in that town.

X

FERKEH CAMP, *June* 15.

AFTER riding over every portion of last Sunday's battle-field, and piecing what I saw myself of the fight with information gathered from conversation with many officers, I am now more than ever struck with the excellence of the plan of attack so carefully arranged by the Sirdar, with the assistance of the chief of the Staff, Colonel Rundle, and the commander of the Infantry Division, Colonel Hunter. As a military operation, the surprise of Ferkéh undoubtedly deserves the highest praise.

Of all the numerous British officers who have taken part in former campaigns against the Mahdists, all allow that the Dervishes have lost nothing of their old valour. They heed death as little as ever. I saw them stand undismayed in the open and fight with dogged determination in the face of our deadly volley fire; they fought on with rifle and spear and knife when charged by the cavalry; each wounded Dervish, as he lay bleeding to death on the ground, was a dangerous and treacherous foe until he had breathed his last; they even did what some authorities have denied that any troops,

however brave, would ever do—they stood in groups firing steadily into our ranks while our Maxim guns poured their streams of bullets on them, mowing them down like grass. I doubt whether any other men in the world would have stood, as these men stood, for nearly two hours against such fearful odds as were opposed to them. But, if one may judge from this fight, the Dervishes have changed their old tactics; they have to a great extent abandoned the reckless rush of spearmen which used to distinguish Sudanese warfare, and rely more on rifle fire, in which their practice has considerably improved. If trained and disciplined (but it is very doubtful whether that savage beast of prey the Baggara ever could be tamed), these men would make magnificent infantry. They display now as much amazing coolness when acting on the defensive as they did wild *élan* in their furious charges of former campaigns. During one part of the fight I was with the men of the 9th Sudanese battalion, who were clearing the hills to the east of Ferkeh, and I saw a handful of twenty-five of the enemy's riflemen stand firm and fire into us until we were twenty yards from them, when they in vain sought safety in flight. The majority of these riflemen were blacks of the same stock as the men of our Sudanese battalions; it is therefore possible to form some idea of how the latter will fight if caught in a "tight corner." The Khalifa's black riflemen, or Jehadia, for the most part fight unwillingly in the cause of the tyrant who has ruined their country, and would gladly

desert to us; but once in the thick of a fight they forget all this, their blood is up, and they set to as if imbued with fanatical frenzy. In my last letter I recorded an incident I witnessed—that of one of our Sudanese soldiers rushing from the ranks to embrace a prisoner who had just been taken and whom he recognized as a relation. Similar strange meetings occurred over the whole field. A man of the 9th battalion found his father lying dead among the enemy. Again, when the men of the 10th battalion were attacking the enemy's riverside position, they were set to clear a hut held by a number of desperate men, who fired on them from the loopholes with considerable effect. At last nearly all the defenders were killed and the few survivors surrendered and came out, among them a big black who, no doubt, up to that moment had been doing his best to kill as many of our men as possible; but as soon as he appeared a soldier laughingly ran forward and put his arms about his neck; then several others, recognizing in him an old friend whom they had not seen for years, welcomed him, their faces beaming with pleasure, and there was a general embracing all round. No fewer than one hundred of the black prisoners whom we took during the fight of the 7th have already been enlisted in the Sudanese battalions.

I can quite understand now the affection every British officer in a Sudanese regiment entertains for these cheery, kindly, very human creatures. Though like happy, thoughtless children at other times, they are ferocious in battle, but they do not

appear to be cruel. They hate the Baggara, for very good reasons, and were they not carefully kept in hand would give the men of that tribe no quarter, and would kill the wounded outright, regarding them, and rightly so, as noxious reptiles; but they are not cold-blooded murderers of women and children, and never inflict on wounded or dead foemen the abominable mutilations in which the Baggara delight. And now that I am on the subject of the Khedive's Sudanese troops, I should like to point out that these gallant black soldiers are unjustly treated in one respect—the only fault of moment I have yet been able to discover in this admirably organized service. I have explained in a former letter that the Sudanese soldiers, unlike the Egyptian conscripts, practically pass their lives in the ranks—that is, a man remains with the colours until he is incapacitated for military service by years or sickness, when he is promptly discharged, presented with four sovereigns, and thrust out into the world. While in the regiment he is in many ways better treated than any soldier in the world; his pay is high, his rations are excellent, he draws extra pay for his wife and family, and his life is decidedly a happy one. But when he is turned adrift after his long years of marching and fighting, a worn-out old man, incapable of work, a poor helpless creature, inasmuch as he never had to think for himself while in the army, everything having been arranged and provided for him, he often drifts into abject poverty, for, improvident black that he is, he soon dissipates

his little fortune of eighty shillings. Some of these old soldiers get employment as caretakers, watchmen, and so forth; others obtain grants of land; but I understand that for the vast majority of them no provision whatever is made by the Government. Thus it constantly happens that British officers, when walking in Cairo or other Egyptian towns, are accosted by broken-down old men in rags, who have fought gallantly under them in by-gone years, and who now appeal to their charity. The assistance rendered to discharged black soldiers imposes a severe tax on the British officers who have served in a Sudanese regiment. It is to be hoped that the Egyptian Government will shortly see its way to abolishing this scandalous state of things by paying small pensions to those who have served it so well.

It is now known that Sunday's attack was a yet more complete surprise to the Dervishes than was at first imagined. After such an experience they will probably be more vigilant for the future. That two large columns, coming from different directions, should have succeeded in getting within rifle range of Ferkeh unperceived argues an extraordinary carelessness on the part of the enemy. The head of the desert column under Major Burn Murdoch surprised a Dervish outpost on a hill to the east of the village, and the shots these fired gave the first alarm to the Dervishes, who, the prisoners tell us, had just come out from morning prayer and were gossiping together outside their huts. It is true that every precaution had been taken by Sir Herbert Kitchener to

put the enemy off their guard. The constant patrolling of the cavalry and camel corps made it extremely difficult for the Dervishes to reconnoitre in the direction of Akasheh and observe the preparations for the advance that were being made there. For the two days preceding the advance, when it became manifest to all that a move of some sort was intended, all our native spies and scouts were kept in Akasheh, lest any traitor among them might give warning to the Dervishes. Even Nature came to our assistance, for on the day of our advance a dense sand-storm obscured the air, veiling the unusual bustle in our camp from the keen eye of any Dervish scout who might be posted on the hills. Curiously enough it was on this very day that the chief Emir of the Danagla contingent at Ferkeh, Osman Azrak, ventured to reconnoitre near Akasheh, saw nothing of our movements through the dust, and unwittingly forwarded our design by lulling the Dervishes into a false security; for on his return he told Hamuda that he had looked into the camp at Akasheh and that all the troops were asleep; there was nothing to fear. Little did he suspect that at that very moment we were silently marching in thousands across the desert and along the river bank to the attack.

This Osman Azrak is a ruffian of strong character, and of all the Emirs in Ferkeh was the most determined and able leader. For many years he has organized and led the cruel raids on the helpless population of the Nile valley; the tracks of his

forays are marked by burnt villages and the bleaching bones of men, women, and children ; his bloodthirsty crimes have made his a name of terror throughout the country. The military authorities were very anxious to secure this pitiless scourge of the frontier ; but he was not to be found among the prisoners or the dead. It was ascertained that he had been wounded in the fight, and had escaped by swimming to a little island in the middle of the Nile ; on the following morning some soldiers while bathing discovered the body of a dead Emir lying on an islet in the middle of the river, and brought it back to the shore with them. It was hoped that the corpse would prove to be that of the notorious brigand ; but wounded prisoners (nearly all our prisoners, by the way, are wounded) who were brought to identify the body recognized it as being that of an Emir of little importance. So Osman Azrak is still at large. As I have already stated in a telegram, he contrived to swim the Nile and fell in with a party of Dervishes who had been despatched from Dongola to attack our line of communication near Sonki, but had been driven back by our Kababish friendlies who guard the Western desert. He mounted one of their camels and rode hard to Suarda to give the alarm to the Dervishes at that post. Thence he led the fugitive warriors of the Khalifa southwards, driving before him a large proportion of the local male population, with the object of preventing them from joining us, and also, no doubt, with the intention of employing

them as soldiers against us later on. The women and children he left behind; these and all the men who had succeeded in avoiding Osman Azrak's impressment crowded round the Government troops when they entered Suarda under Major Burn Murdoch, welcomed them with shouts of joy, and implored our officers not to desert them as they had been deserted of old; never again to leave them to the mercy of the Dervish scorpions. Osman and his following hurried on to Kedden, near the Kaibar cataract, about fifty miles above Suarda, where the Dervishes have a small post and have collected supplies. According to our latest information he has withdrawn the Dervishes from Kedden, and is continuing his retreat to Dongola itself. There is now practically nothing to oppose us between this and Dongola; but, unless Mahdism is really dead and the Khalifa has lost all his power, we are likely to encounter very formidable resistance when we approach Dongola, for the Khalifa is said to be now sending his best troops there and preparing to stake his fortunes in a great fight in that neighbourhood.

We gather from the papers that timid people at home regard this expedition as an exceedingly rash venture, that no reliance can be placed on the Khedive's troops, and that the 100 or so gallant young officers with this force are being led to their destruction. No one here shares these apprehensions; all have confidence in the Sirdar, and are of opinion that under his cautious and able leadership the Egyptian army is quite capable of capturing

Dongola and holding the country afterwards. It appears to be the Sirdar's policy to advance deliberately step by step; to make his position secure after each step before venturing on another; to run no unnecessary risks, but at the right moment to strike hard with unexpected suddenness and to follow up the blow with energy. He knows well that he cannot trifle with such an enemy as that opposed to him. No further advance will be made until the Nile is full (the rise of the river has commenced); but in the meanwhile all preparations are being pushed forward with what may be described as a quiet rapidity—for there is no fuss—that speaks of admirable organization and very hard work on the part of all those skilled and keen officers who are responsible for the different departments. How few people, by the way, in England, have the slightest conception of what these young British officers are like on active service, or realize their energy, zeal, and devotion to duty!

We are a long way from our base, the heat is intense, and transport camels are dying in numbers on the road; yet what an amount of work has been accomplished since we advanced from Akasheh but a week ago! Here, at Ferkeh, we have already a month's supplies for 10,000 men; at our new outpost, Suarda, thirty-eight miles beyond this, we have two months' provisions for the garrison of 2000 men. The railway will be extended to Akasheh by the 26th of this month, and will then be pushed on to Ferkeh with the utmost speed.

At this end the Egyptian and black troops are constructing the railway formation at such a rate that the engineers surveying the line have difficulty in keeping ahead of them. The telegraph wire was brought here on the 10th, and will be at Suarda within a few days. For a great part of the way the non-insulated wire is merely laid on the sand, which in this dry country is an absolute non-conductor of electricity. The terminus of the railway will, for the present, be about five miles above Ferkeh, where a site has been selected for a steamer dock. The three new gunboats now in course of construction will be brought here in sections by rail; they will then be put together and launched on the Nile. Several other armed vessels will steam up here as soon as the cataracts are navigable. A formidable little flotilla will then be able to co-operate with the land forces, and an advance on Dongola will be feasible.

XI

FERKEH, *June* 18.

THE inaction of the Dervishes while we were establishing our long line of communication was a source of astonishment to us all. They allowed our convoys to straggle along the narrow track for three months unmolested until we had all ready at Akasheh to strike a crushing blow. It was only towards the end of May, when it was too late, that the Dervish leaders bestirred themselves to act on the offensive. Mahomed Wad el Bishara, Emir-in-chief of Dongola, in command of all the Dervishes in the province, then instructed the Emirs at Ferkeh to fall upon our lines of communication and to attack Akasheh itself. He himself sent a force from Dongola to intercept our convoys near Sonki, while another body of men was despatched from Ferkeh by Hamuda to threaten Ambigol Wells. Both these ventures failed, the first party having been repulsed by the Kababish friendlies, the second by the camel corps. But it is certain that had our advance on Ferkeh been delayed but a few days longer the Dervishes would have attacked us in force.

This is proved by some most interesting letters which were found in Hamuda's houses in Ferkeh and Suarda. They form portion of a continuous correspondence that was carried on between Mahomed Wad el Bishara and the Ferkeh Emirs. They throw a light on the tactics of the enemy, their organization, the dissensions and jealousies of their leaders. The letters of the Emir-in-chief of Dongola are admirable in their way and reveal a strong personality. One gathers from them that this young chief, who already, at the age of thirty, has acquired the reputation of being an able general, must be a man of fine intellect, earnest, a zealous servant of his master the Khalifa, no rash fanatic in war, for it is evident that he does not despise his enemy, and we find him constantly instructing his subordinates to exercise due caution when conducting military operations against the "miserable beings," the "cunning enemies of God," as he is pleased to call us. We are likely to find this young man a formidable enemy later on. He will not allow himself to be caught in a trap as did the Emirs at Ferkeh. Translations of these letters, made by an Egyptian clerk in the Intelligence Department, have been placed at my disposal. I have had to alter these slightly here and there, so as to render the meaning clear, and I have omitted the numerous repetitions which make the Oriental epistolary style somewhat tedious. But the following are fairly close renderings of the original letters.

The first of these letters was written by Mahomed

Wad el Bishara to Hamuda, in December last, and orders him to raid the Nile valley in the neighbourhood of Wady Halfa. After the usual salutations, he proceeds as follows:—

News has been received that the enemies of God have recently sent some camelmen, escorted by ten soldiers, to Ambigol and Akasheh, to procure wood for their railway. (The men were collecting the sleepers of the old Akasheh railway, which were to be employed in the construction of the new Korosko line.) This opportunity must not be lost. Please, therefore, despatch all horsemen available in the camp. Appoint as their head one of the brethren whom you believe to be gallant, active, and zealous in fighting in the cause of religion. Send with him all the camelmen excepting those you require as scouts. They are to proceed to where these men of the enemy are collecting wood, and if they come across them they are to defeat them. If they do not meet them let them proceed along the river bank to the south of Sarras, where doubtless some inhabitants exist. These must be attacked and plundered. Let the attack be made at noon. When they have completed this work our men will return, marching throughout the night. Let them leave one hundred horses at Ambigol, so that they can find them rested and ready to start back, for this will be useful; more especially if the Evil Spirit move the enemy to pursue our men. It is important that this party should set out at once, before the enemy hear of our intentions. Let the men start in good spirits and with resolution. Urge on the brother, whom you may appoint as leader, to be vigilant day and night, so that we may attain our object with the help of the worshipful God. You will, at the same time, continue to send out scouts and keep up constant communication with me. My friend, impress it on the men that they are not to allow the enemy to get hold of them. After the attack they must return at once, without delay. Let there be no slackness or lack of vigilance.

Hamuda obeyed these instructions, selected from the brethren as leader Mahomed Hamza el Engeriabi, who, it is to be presumed, was "gallant

and active," and possessed the other necessary qualifications, and despatched him northward with a party of camelmen and horsemen. The result was that raid on the village of Adendan on Dec. 10, which is supposed to have first awakened certain high authorities to the necessity of proving to the Mahdists that they could no longer be permitted to harass the frontier with impunity. Having successfully accomplished the work entrusted to him, Mahomed Hamza, in the following letter, informs Hamuda of what occurred :—

God has given victory to his religion and has frustrated the enemy. We reached the village of Adendan, and God has destroyed all his enemies who were in that village. After burning their houses, cutting their telegraph line, and pulling down the poles, we returned all pleased and well. To-day we came to Magraka and heard that you were at Akasheh. Thanks to God, who made you a refuge to the Companions, who uphold the Religion of God, and a barrier to the enemies who have been defeated by God. May God accept your doings and fulfil all your hopes in this world and in the world to come.

Even as early as April 11 the Dervishes, hearing of our preparations, began to suspect that the "enemies of God" were meditating mischief; for on that date Mahomed Wad el Bishara wrote thus from Dongola to Hamuda :—

I have written to-day to Hassan Wad el Nejumi to move with all his force from Karma to Kadrama to protect the *shuna* (store) in that place against the enemies and to obtain information. I informed him that if anything occurs to you which necessitates his presence he is at once to go to your assistance. You are well aware, dear one, that the frustrated enemies of God are deceitful

and dexterous. Therefore, always be on the alert, and if you need the assistance of Hassan Wad el Nejumi and his force, send for them at once. Send me information regularly. Send spies to the east and west. Send strict instructions to your *Wakil* at Suarda to keep a watch on the west bank, as the tracks of spying camelmen have been seen there. I have sent men as far as Selima to discover the tracks and to bring me information.

In another letter from the Dongola Governor to Hamuda, dated May 9, he alludes to the jealousies among the Emirs, and makes some curious and cautious suggestions as to what should be done with the Jehadia, the hapless black riflemen who were known to be disaffected, and are ever thrust into the forefront of battle. He writes:—

I have received your letter, in which you report Yusef Angara for disobedience, and ask me to instruct the Jehadia that are under your orders. But I have already informed Yusef Angara that he is under your command, and gave orders to Udu Badr before he left me with his Jehadia that he was to obey you. You have only now to give orders in the name of the Religion and they will fulfil them, each leading his own Jehadia. They should not be separated from their Jehadia, who need their special care, which holds the men together in the battle, encourages them, and makes them stand as they did in this fight (the skirmish of May 1). Afford the Jehadia satisfaction by giving them their pay, so that they may be the more energetic in upholding religion. I am well aware that the Jehadia are not like the rest of the army. They are too ignorant to direct their own affairs. They are unable to submit their own requirements like the rest of the troops; for this reason we have placed Yusef Angara and Udu Badr over them as chiefs, to look after their affairs and submit their requests to you. But they and all the army are under you. They should not be separated; but if on the day of fighting you wish to have a *rub* (regiment) of Jehadia with you, do so, taking either the *rub* of Yusef Angara or that of Udu Badr; and I have no objection to this.

It appears that the skirmish with our cavalry on May 1 (in which, by the way, the cavalry did not make the charge for which they were so highly lauded at home, the first reports that reached Wady Halfa being incorrect) was claimed as a victory by the Dervishes, and the Governor of Dongola, in the following letter, dated May 25, warmly thanks the Emirs who on that occasion led the Khalifa's troops, and instructs them to turn our position at Akasheh and cut up our force at that post:—

In the name of the merciful and benevolent God. Praised be the generous and Almighty God. From the servant of God, Mahomed Bishara, to his beloved Hamuda Iddris and Osman Issa. (The real name of the leader better known as Osman Azrak, the one important survivor of the fight of May 7.) May God commit them to his care. I inform you, my beloved, that the letter of one of you, Hamuda, has brought me the news that our firm and active brethren, headed by Osman Issa, in compliance with my orders, have—may God grant them a good reward—fulfilled their duty, defeated the enemies of God by night, filled their hearts with fear and anxiety, and have come back victorious, and, with the exception of the two wounded men, safe. We thanked God and prayed to him to grant a good reward to the warriors of religion, and to shower on them his blessings, and to appreciate duly their action. They are able warriors and more than able. Now, my beloved, that you have by the help of God struck this blow at these miserable beings, be always on the alert, be careful of them. Try to beat them down and fill their hearts with fear. You have now a sufficiency of camels. Place on them brave men on whom you can depend, and let them proceed to the north of Akasheh, follow the river route, and drive the enemy from their river-side positions. You will also arrange that a body of horsemen leaves Ferkeh to attack the camp of the miserable beings from another direction at the same time that the first force of camelmen is destroying them. To engage them thus on all sides will throw them into a state of disorder and alarm. You

have, however, yourself to decide the best measures to be taken for the advancement of our cause. Those who are present can see what those who are absent cannot see. In any case, to attack the enemy is necessary.

The Emirs at Ferkeh received one more letter of admonition from the Governor of Dongola, before their force was annihilated and they themselves were slaughtered almost to a man on that fatal Sunday. Wad el Bishara pathetically beseeches them to put aside their petty jealousies in the presence of the enemy, and again urges them to be vigilant. It would have been well for them had they paid more attention to this last injunction. This letter was brought from Dongola by the Emir Mohamed Koku. He reached Ferkeh on the 6th, and he was among the slain in the next day's action. The Emir-in-chief writes :—

You are, thank God, of good understanding, and are thoroughly acquainted with those rules of religion which enjoin love and unison. Thanks be to God that I receive but good reports of you. But you are now close to the enemy of God, and have with you, with the help of God, a sufficient number of men. I therefore request you to unite together, to have the heart of a single man founded on love and unity. Consult with one another, and thus you will ensure good results, which will strengthen the religion and vex the heathen, the enemies of God. Do not move without consulting one another, and such others, also, in the army who are full of sense and wisdom. Employ their plans and tricks of war, in the general fight more especially. Your army, thank God, is large; if you unite and act as one hand your action will be regular; you will, with the help of God, defeat the enemies of God and set at ease the mind of the Khalifa, peace be on him. Follow this advice and do not allow any intrigues to come between you. Rely on God in all your doings; be bold in your dealings.

with the enemy; let them find no flaw in your dispositions for the fight. But be ever most vigilant; for these enemies of God are cunning: may God destroy them! Our brethren, Mohamed Koku, with two others, bring you this letter; on their return they will inform me whether you work in unison or not. Let them find you as ordered in religion, in good spirits, doing your utmost to ensure the victory of religion. Remember, my brethren, that what moves me to urge on you to love each other and to unite is my love for you and my desire for your good. This is a trial of war; so for us love and amity are of utmost necessity. You were of the supporters of the Mahdi, peace be on him; you were as one spirit occupying one body. When the enemy know that you are quite united they will be much provoked. Strive, therefore, to provoke these enemies of religion. May God bless you and render you successful.

Carefully-kept books were also found containing the army accounts, the receipts and payments of the treasury, and so forth. From these it was discovered that upwards of 60,000 rounds of ammunition had been sent from Dongola to Suarda in the course of last month.

Men have come in from Dongola, and we know how the news of the disaster at Ferkeh was received by the Dervishes in that city. Mahomed Wad el Bishara was overcome with rage and grief when he read the long roll of dead Emirs which Osman Azrak had sent to him. He tore his beard and swore that he would yet humble the "miserable beings and enemies of God," and he ordered a general conscription of all the males in the province of Dongola capable of bearing arms, with the result that numbers of the inhabitants, who have no desire to be slain in the Dervish cause, are flying north-

wards. In Dongola a feeling of consternation prevails; and it appears that many of the people, under the impression that our victorious troops are still pushing on, are leaving the city to seek refuge in the south. Even some of the leaders are affected by the general panic. Thus Hassan Wad el Nejumi (cousin of the famous and gallant Nejumi who led the Dervishes and met his death at Toski), having escaped on a camel from Suarda, where he was slightly wounded by a fragment of one of our shells, rode into Dongola, but refused to stay there or even to dismount, crying out, "This is too near the pursuers. I am going on to Omdurman." At the present moment we could probably enter Dongola without encountering any opposition. But we have to wait for the high Nile, and cannot push on from here for at least five weeks. By that time the enemy will have had time to recover from their panic, concentrate troops at Dongola, and organize their defence. It is well that it is so. A big fight at Dongola, resulting in a crushing defeat of the enemy, will produce a better effect than an unopposed occupation, will save much future bloodshed, and will greatly hasten the final pacification of the Sudan. Some here are of opinion that the battle we shall have to fight at or near Dongola will be one of the most stubbornly contested ever known in this country.

XII

FERKEH, *June* 16.

ON the afternoon of the 7th I rode over the whole field of that morning's battle to supplement my first impressions of the fight with closer observation of the various positions. Our own dead were being buried, but the hundreds of the slain enemy were left to lie where they had fallen until the following day. They lay in groups among the river-side huts and palms, where they had so stubbornly resisted the 1st Brigade, and also along all the track of the 2nd Brigade's advance across the hills and *khors* further inland. The large majority—about seventy-five per cent.—of the enemy's dead were Baggara; the remainder, unfortunately, were blacks and Jaalin who had fought us against their will and had been placed in the forefront of the battle by their Baggara rulers. The Baggara, though greatly outnumbering the Jaalin, regard the latter as their only rivals in the Sudan. The Khalifa appears to be bent on the extermination of the tribe. At Ferkeh, for example, the Jaalin were placed in the most dangerous positions where they could not fail to suffer great losses from our fire, and could be

readily slain by the Baggara behind them should they show any signs of defection.

On a knoll close to the village I found a number of wounded prisoners collected who were being questioned by the heads of our Intelligence Department—Major Wingate and Slatin Pasha. They all wore the Mahdist uniform—the white *jibba* covered with large square patches of blue cloth. The blacks were like our own Sudanese troops, save that they were not so sleek and well fed; but they will soon present a better appearance, for a hundred of those who were not severely wounded were at once enlisted in the Sudanese battalions, and no doubt all others capable of bearing arms will be enrolled later on. The Jaalin prisoners were fine-looking men and seemed to be very pleased that they had fallen into our hands. The Jaalin inhabit the banks of the Nile near Berber, and are a proud and religious people claiming descent from Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet. They have for a long time been the principal slave-hunters in the Sudan (the famous Zubeir was of this tribe), and were formerly among the most zealous of Mahdists. But they have long since lost all faith in the false Prophet, and, being themselves almost the only Arabs in the now demoralized Sudan who live a virtuous life, and who—to quote from Slatin Pasha's book—"hold morality in high esteem as a necessary condition for a healthy and contented existence," they are disgusted with the gross profligacy encouraged by the Khalifa, are ready to

declare themselves for the Government so soon as they can safely do so, and have made overtures to that effect. The prisoners expressed their loathing of the Baggara in the strongest terms. Major Wingate suggested to one of the Jaalin Emirs that he should return to Dongola to facilitate the escape of his relations, who would be well treated if they came over to us. "Ask me to do anything but that!" exclaimed the man. "Let me be your slave, do anything you will with me, but do not send me back to those detestable people. It is not that I fear to be killed by the Baggara, but that it would be horrible to me to have to live among them again."

Among these prisoners there were but a few Baggara, and these were badly wounded, for the Baggara, when they found their retreat cut off, expecting no quarter at our hands, made up their minds to die, and fought desperately to the death like wild beasts at bay. It was easy to distinguish them from the other prisoners. One had but to look at them to realize that they were of a dangerous breed of men who would be a curse to any land and people under their domination. They are of smaller stature than most Arabs, slight of build, with small extremities and lithe as wild cats. They are of much darker complexion than the Jaalin—in fact, they are almost as black as the negroes—their features are well shaped, and many of them wear small pointed beards. The majority of these Baggara prisoners looked like the fiends they really

are—of most sinister expression, with murder and every crime speaking from their savage eyes. The Baggara were ever known as a cruel and blood-thirsty people. Slave-hunters and raiders, the Red Indians of the Sudan, as they have been termed, they made desolate the rich regions they occupied on the western banks of the White Nile, for their constant forays rendered it unsafe for the more peaceably-inclined inhabitants to cultivate the soil. But, having been let loose for all these years by the Khalifa to pillage and massacre the populations of the Sudan, their worst qualities have been intensified by this long licence, and they have become the most inhuman of men, very devils of cruelty and unbridled lusts. As being the race favoured by the Khalifa, they have waxed intolerably arrogant, assert themselves as lords of all the country, and regard all other men as dirt. Courage is their one good quality. Though decimated by many wars, the Baggara fighting men can still be counted in tens of thousands. They are not likely to allow the power which they have so long abused to be wrested from them without making a determined struggle.

The enemy's losses were even heavier than was at first supposed, and it is now known that upwards of fifty Emirs were killed in the fight or died of their wounds afterwards. Here, as in other Eastern countries, everything depends on the chief men, and the loss of so many leaders will disorganize a great portion of the Dervish forces in Dongola.

In addition to those I have mentioned in former letters, there were slain at Ferkeh the following well-known men, among others:—Mahomed Wad Koku, the first Kadi of Dongola, who had arrived at Ferkeh the day before the fight with despatches from the Governor of Dongola; Karamalla Karkassawi, Emir-in-chief of Equatoria, who intrigued against Lupton Bey in 1884, and brought about the surrender to the Mahdi of the rich province of Bahr el Ghazal; Yusuf Angara, who was in command of the Jehadia, a Taaishi, and near relation of the Khalifa. Several others of the Khalifa's relations were killed. There is scarcely a big family among the Baggara that has not its dead to mourn.

Slatin Pasha rode over the field, and among the dead recognized man after man whom he had met at Omdurman during his long captivity. There were strange meetings, too, between him and some of the prisoners. I saw him warmly greet one stout old man who walked up with some difficulty, supported by two men, for he had no less than six bullets in his body. This was the well-known Jaalin Emir, Taher el Obeid, who had befriended the captive in Omdurman, and at great risk to his own life had ever treated him with great kindness. Taher el Obeid comes of a holy family, and is regarded as a person of great sanctity; he is glad to be out of the Khalifa's clutches; he is being well cared for, and will in all probability recover from his wounds.

Slatin Pasha, as second of the Intelligence Depart-

ment, is of inestimable service at the present moment. Being known to every one in the Sudan, having many friends there, he has been able to reassure the Emirs as to the intentions of the Egyptian Government, and has contrived to have it spread throughout the Sudan that we are fighting the hated Baggara alone, have no quarrel with the Jaalin or others, but have come to deliver them from the detestable tyranny of the Khalifa and his tribe. It is reported that the Khalifa attributes the present expedition to the vengeance of the European who was his slave for twelve long years, and he has been heard to say that the escape of Slatin Pasha was a greater blow to him than the loss of Kassala. Slatin Pasha, in his book, says of the Khalifa :—"Utterly ignorant of the political situation, he imagined that if I succeeded in escaping I should induce the Egyptian Government, or some European Power, to enter the Sudan; and he knew well that in that case I should form a link between it and the principal tribal chiefs, who were disaffected to him and longed for the return of a settled form of government."

There were several women and children among our six hundred prisoners. Happily, so far as is known, none of these were killed or wounded in the fight. The chief wives of Osman Azrak and other Emirs of rank are in our hands. They accept the situation quite cheerfully, and the widows of the dead Baggara do not seem to be in the least degree distressed at the loss of their lords; it therefore

looks as if these scourges of the Sudan present no amiable traits, even in their family relations.

For two days after the fight most of us were left in a condition of some discomfort. Our baggage had not come up; stores were scarce; we lived among the dust and dirt of the ruined huts by the river, in unpleasantly close proximity to numbers of unburied dead Dervishes, horses, and camels. The heat was intense; the irritating dust swept perpetually over us; and as the huts were roofless they afforded no shelter against the vertical rays of the midday sun. On May 8, the stench of the dead began to be unsupportable, so the camp was moved about two miles higher up the river. Here we were able to build *tokuls* (huts of *halfa* straw) and make ourselves very comfortable among the palms which border the Nile. This is a pleasant spot. The broad river flows among a number of rocky islets, which will all be covered at the rise. The Ferkeh mountain and other peaks of bold outline form a fine background to the scene. The aspect of the country has been ever improving since we advanced from the black wilderness of the "Belly of Rocks," and here we have come to a really fertile country. On both banks of the Nile are broad belts of wild vegetation. As I look from my *tokul* across the river I see great stretches of long *halfa* grass, extending to a considerable distance inland, and concealing from my view the dreary desert beyond. Among this now yellow grass are scattered many palms and other trees, which will all be beautifully

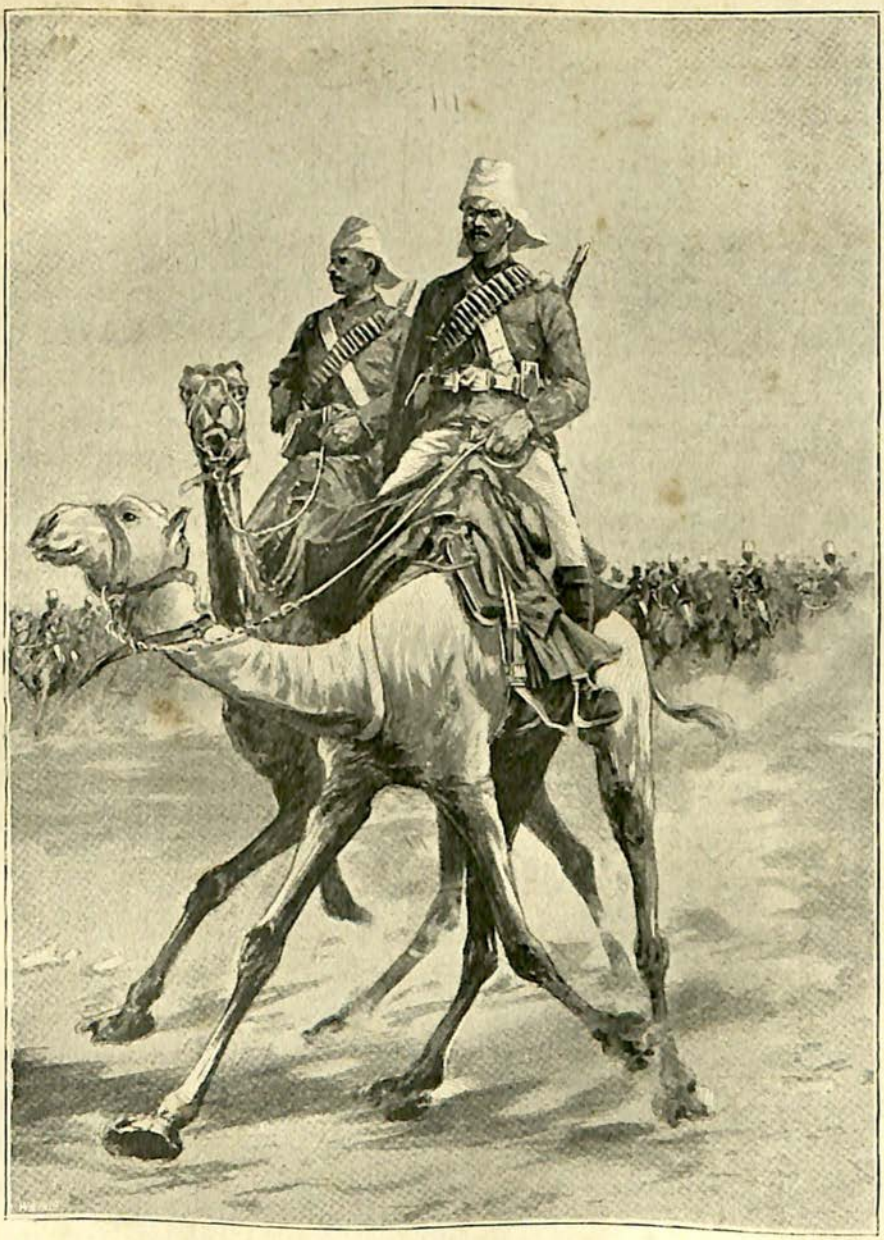
green later on. On this side of the river, too, it is the same; and everywhere ruined huts, the divisions of former fields, the remains of *sakiyeh* and broken irrigation trenches prove that all this rich soil was once carefully cultivated. But no *sakiyeh* now moans between the frontier and Dongola; for where the Baggara sets his foot the corn does not grow. From a point near Mograka an almost unbroken belt of date palms, a quarter of a mile in breadth, is said to extend along the Nile to Dongola. In order to obtain full crops it is necessary to artificially fructify the date palms. This the Dervishes have for years entirely neglected to do, so that these trees, once a source of considerable wealth, are practically sterile, and produce but very little fruit. Officers who have just ridden down from Suarda, and who knew this country before it was abandoned to the Dervishes, tell me that they remember it then as a green and beautiful garden, capable of supporting a large population; but that they found no signs of recent cultivation as they rode down the bank, and the once populous villages near Suarda, which contained comfortable houses of two storeys, are now ruined and deserted.

This is the result of that "Sudan for the Sudanese" which had its advocates in England, and which means the plunder of the Sudan for the Baggara, the laying waste of a rich country, and the spoliation of the miserable local populations. I have recently seen it stated in English journals that the people of the Sudan are now content with the

Khalifa's rule, which is less oppressive than it used to be. According to all the information of our Intelligence Department and the statements of prisoners and refugees, in one respect only does the Khalifa treat the local population with less severity than of old—finding that he can make use of the inhabitants, he no longer has them slaughtered out of mere cruel caprice. But, as I have pointed out in former letters, their wives, daughters, cattle, and crops are taken from them by the rapacious Baggara, against whom they have no redress. That these people are not contented with the present *régime* is proved by their joyous welcoming of our troops as their deliverers, and by the exodus they are making from the province of Mahass and the country beyond, in order to fly northwards along the west bank of the Nile to place themselves under our protection. Many prisoners have been carefully examined as to the Dervish method of administering the country. They say that in some districts the Khalifa's emissaries carry on their exactions with a certain show of legality, and euphemistically speak of their robberies as taxation. In theory certain fixed percentages of crops and cattle are supposed to be collected for the Government by the Baggara tax-collectors, but in practice it invariably comes to this :—Twenty or thirty Baggara arrive at a place accompanied by their slaves; they read out to the people the Khalifa's proclamation with regard to taxation, and then seize all the land and all the cattle. They apportion out to the original inhabit-

ants only just so much land as will enable them to procure the barest subsistence, and then enter into possession of all the remainder, employing their slaves to cultivate it for their benefit. The bygone Egyptian *régime* at its very worst was never so bad as this.

In my letter describing the fight of the 7th I was unable to say much of the doings of the desert column; but now, though no full report has come in, we have received some details of what occurred. It seems that the Dervishes had taken it for granted that if we did advance on Ferkeh it would be by the desert route; and they decided to oppose us in the defile debouching on to the Ferkeh plain, which our men would have to traverse. It was their plan to first open a heavy enfilading fire from the rocks on either side, and then to charge the column. But having received no notice of our approach, they had no time to make their dispositions; the ravine was left practically undefended; Major Burn Murdoch with his cavalry drove in the outposts, and then the whole desert column became engaged with the enemy at the same time that the river column, deploying in front of the enemy's position, opened the attack on the other side. The horse artillery shelled the village from the hills; while the cavalry cut off the enemy when they attempted to escape up the *khors* into the desert, and drove them back into the open plain to be mown down by our infantry. When the rout became general the cavalry followed up the enemy as far as Mograka, charging several



THE EGYPTIAN CAMEL CORPS.

times with terrible effect. They were halting for a short time at Mograka when the Sirdar rode up and promoted Major Burn Murdoch and Captain Broadwood in recognition of the splendid services rendered by the desert column. The pursuit was then renewed, and the cavalry reached Suarda early on the following morning, having (after a wearisome night march) fought a battle and followed up the enemy for thirty-eight miles beyond Ferkeh in the space of twenty-four hours—a magnificent performance. The horse artillery, under Captain Young, also made a wonderful march, and were at Suarda shelling the fugitive Dervishes beyond the river on the morning of the 8th. In short, all arms of the desert column—cavalry, infantry, camel corps, and Maxims—did excellent service. Major Townshend, who was second in command of the column, and led the fine 12th Sudanese battalion, headed off the enemy when they attempted to break out by our right flank. He brought his men up at the double with fixed bayonets, with the intention of charging the Dervishes, but the latter turned, scattered, and fled with such speed that the gallant 12th on this occasion had no chance of coming to close quarters with their foe with cold steel.

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XIII

FERKEH, *June* 28.

SOME years ago, in a clever little skit on the belief in four-dimensional space, I read a description of the imaginary "Lineland," a world of but one dimension, length, where the confined Linelanders could only move backwards and forwards on the one straight line without breadth, which was to them the universe. Here, too, in Nubia, we are practically campaigning in a Lineland; the intervals between the more stirring incidents of war are, therefore, likely to be longer than is generally the case in happier countries which have breadth as well as length. On this long line of the Nile, with its narrow fringe of vegetation on either side, the conditions of an invasion are unique. To the west and east of the line extend the deserts. Thus after their defeat at Ferkeh the enemy had but one road by which to fly, the Nile bank; to seek refuge in the desert on the right or left was to perish of thirst. They continued their flight for a hundred miles without attempting a stand, and it is doubtful whether there are now any Dervishes between this and Dongola. The result is that no sooner had the

Egyptian troops won the battle of Ferkeh than we found ourselves living in a state of as complete peace and security as if we were in Piccadilly. We know that the Dervishes cannot cross the waterless desert in sufficient force to fall on our rear. There is nothing to fear on either flank; we have driven the enemy so far up the one possible line of retreat that a long time must elapse before we can be in touch with them again. So must it be when one wages war in Lineland; and we shall now have to wait here peaceably, and as patiently as we can, until the Nile rises and enables us to advance on Dongola.

At present, therefore, there is but little of interest to record here; convoys are ever arriving with supplies; the railway is being pushed on from both ends; the telegraph has reached Suarda. The non-insulated wire is not suspended on posts, by the way, but is merely laid on the dry desert sand, which is an almost absolute non-conductor, save when it rains. Captain Manifold, R.E., who has with such creditable rapidity placed our base in telegraphic communication with our advanced post, tells me that never before has an attempt been made to telegraph with a Morse instrument along so great a length of wire laid on the bare ground. The plan succeeds admirably here, but would be impracticable in most countries of the world. While speaking of the telegraph I may mention that as this single wire can only carry a limited number of words per day, it has been arranged that no

correspondent can send a telegram of more than 200 words in length. He can, of course, send further telegrams in the course of the day; but all the first telegrams of his colleagues will be despatched before his second message can go through, while second messages will be forwarded before third messages, and so on. The system is fair to all, but on the 7th there appears to have been some irregularity in the order of despatch of our telegrams; the line, moreover, was blocked, and few of our second telegrams got through. It must not be supposed, therefore, because a paper published a column of matter on the 8th as coming from its correspondent here, that it received from him anything approaching to that amount.

We are now very well informed as to all that is going on in Dongola, for numbers of black soldiers are deserting to us from the enemy and refugees come in daily. I have already telegraphed some of the statements of these people, which testify to the great effect produced both on our Dervish foes and on the local populations by our victory at Ferkeh and the subsequent rapid following up of the enemy as far as the Kaibar cataract, 100 miles beyond. A refugee has given another graphic description of the reception of the disastrous news at Dongola. He says that on the 10th an Emir entered the town with eighty camels and some Arab prisoners—probably Kababish friendlies fighting for the Egyptian Government. Wad el Bishara ordered the drums to be beaten, and the whole population

came out to see the "enemies of God." There was great rejoicing among the Dervishes and a pretence of rejoicing among the many who dare not express their real feelings in that city of terror. While this was going on, there slowly rode into the town thirty men on weary camels. They brought the first news of the fight at Ferkeh and the annihilation of Hamuda's force. Then the joy of the people was changed into consternation, and numbers at once fled to the south; it was rumoured that the Government troops were still pressing on and would soon be at the gates. Bishara tore his beard, and then hurried to his house, where he locked himself in to mourn and pray alone, for he is one of the few honest fanatics left among the hypocritical brigands who call themselves Mahdists. He wrote a letter to the Khalifa giving him an account of the disaster, and asking him whether it was his wish that he, Bishara, should abandon Dongola and retire with the garrison on Omdurman, or hold the place against the enemy; in the latter case he pointed out it was indispensable that large reinforcements should be sent to him at once from Omdurman. In the meanwhile he made all his dispositions for defence. He attempted to enforce a general conscription of all males in the country capable of bearing arms. He called in from the Western desert the Arabs friendly—in a rather lukewarm fashion—to the Dervish cause; and ordered them to close all the wells, no doubt with the object, not only of preventing an advance on the part of our Arab

irregulars, but also of making it impossible for his own Arabs to retire into the desert if they became disaffected. He also ordered a number of the horsemen who had fled from Ferkeh and Suarda to return to Kedden, where Osman Azrak then was, and under the command of that Emir to collect by force the entire male population of the province of Mahass and drive it up to Dongola. Those horsemen joined Osman Azrak and his following at Kedden, a village close to the Kaibar cataract, and had already commenced to execute the orders they had received, when, on June 17, the reconnaissance under Captain Mahon, composed of two squadrons of cavalry and one company of camel corps, appeared in sight. The Dervishes, though greatly superior in numbers to the Egyptians, fled without striking a blow, leaving in our hands eleven boats deeply laden with grain. This reconnaissance arrived just in time to save the inhabitants of Mahass from the clutches of the Dervishes. The poor creatures were overwhelmed with joy at having escaped the dreaded Dervish impressment, and about two thousand of them at once travelled northwards to Suarda to place themselves under the protection of the Government. Many others are now following their example. These refugees are, for the present, being fed by us, a severe tax on our commissariat. It is chiefly with the object of securing the grain which these people left behind them before the Dervishes seize or destroy it, that our patrols have pushed so far up the river bank. The following

extract from the verbatim statement of one of these refugees illustrates the feeling of the entire local population of the Nile valley, at any rate between this and Berber :—

We Mahass people have been terribly oppressed by the Dervishes. They took from us all they wanted. We were powerless and had no redress. The roads are all closed, so we could not escape to you. If we had attempted to do so we should have been killed. When we heard that the Government troops had occupied Suarda, our hearts were filled with joy. Now we shall enjoy peace and protection.

Another incident shows the state of panic into which the Dervishes were thrown by our victory at Ferkeh. Of the three small steamers constructed by Gordon during the siege of Khartum the Dervishes still possess one whose machinery will work. Wad el Bishara, hearing that a number of wounded fugitives from Ferkeh had reached the third cataract, sent this steamer to Abu Fatmeh to bring these men up. Three boats were filled with the wounded, and the steamer was preparing to take them in tow when the news arrived that the Government troops were at Kedden. On hearing this the Dervish captain slipped his moorings and went full steam up the river until he reached Dongola, and so afraid was he of being overhauled by the dreaded "enemies of God," that he cast off the towlines and left behind the three boatloads of wounded to drift helplessly down stream.

The Khalifa's reply to Wad el Bishara's letter ought shortly to arrive; and it hangs on that reply

whether we enter Dongola practically unopposed or there engage in what may prove to be the fiercest battle ever fought in the Sudan; for if the Khalifa decides to send reinforcements to Dongola and make a stand there we are certain to encounter a desperate resistance. The Khalifa's sovereignty, the very existence of Mahdism, will be staked on that fight. Wad el Bishara has a very insufficient force at his disposal in Dongola; but it is said that he is sending a number of men under several Emirs to establish a strong post at Kermeh near Abu Fatmeh. He has now taken alarm at the general disaffection, the desertion of so many of his black troops, and the exodus north of the local population, and he has taken the precaution of imprisoning all the local sheikhs and leading men who are suspected of favouring the Egyptian Government. This disaffection is very widespread; thus when Osmán Azrak at Kermeh the other day ordered the Kenana Arabs to remain with him they flatly refused to do so. "Son of a slave," they said to him, "do you wish to have us all killed even as you had all those men killed at Ferkeh?" Many of the Baggara themselves are also become weary of the miserable life the frontier Dervish lives, now that there is nothing left to plunder, and are leaving the Khalifa's army in small bodies to return to their own distant country. Many of the Dervish leaders too have evidently lost heart; Osman Azrak, for example, who, on reaching Dongola, told Wad el Bishara that further resistance was hopeless. "The arms of

these enemies of God," he said, "are not like the guns they used in former wars; these pour out bullets like water; it is certain death to all the faithful who stand against these riflemen."

I rode the other day up the river bank, through the ruined villages of Mograka, Kosheh, and Ginnis. All the way the river is lined with houses, and the villages themselves are of considerable size, proving how large a population once occupied this fertile country. The dense belts of neglected date-palms, the thousands of acres of now bare sand, where the furrows and embankments of former laborious irrigation are still visible, tell their own tale. The land is abandoned to wild beasts, and the shy hippopotamus, never seen anywhere near here twelve years ago, now frequents the reaches of the Nile which flow through this desolated region.

When the Dervishes first occupied this province of Sukkot and the adjoining province of Mahass a considerable portion of the local population sought refuge in Egyptian territory, and colonies of these refugees have been formed in the neighbourhood of Wady Halfa; but many of the inhabitants, not anticipating the cruel tyranny to which they were to be subjected, remained in their own country. Under Dervish rule, from one cause and another, they have been gradually disappearing; for it is estimated that their number has been reduced to one-quarter of what it was ten years ago. The refugees at Halfa and elsewhere, who came from this district, are now beseeching the Government to

allow them to return at once to their old lands at Ginnis and Kosheh; and, no doubt, before long, we shall hear the droning of the water-wheels and see the rich green crops extending far on either side of the rushing Nile. Merchants also, Arabs, Berberis, and others, are asking permission to come up here and open out the trade with the liberated Sudan. All the people seem to be reassured; they apparently think that we have come to stay, and do not apprehend that they will be left in the lurch this time. A British officer in the Egyptian army said to me a few days ago, "If after all our promises we go back and again desert these poor people I shall be ashamed to show my face in the country, and shall certainly leave the Egyptian service." This is the sentiment of a good many of these keen frontier soldiers. All here were amazed on reading Mr. Morley's speech at Leeds, a speech in which he quietly ignored the whole history of the Sudan, the great changes that have taken place within the last twelve years, and all that has been written on the subject by competent observers on the frontier. Mr. Morley hopes that we are not about to renew the policy which twelve years since proved "a great disaster to the fame and fortunes of this country." If these words are taken in a somewhat different sense from that intended by Mr. Morley, they represent the feeling in Egypt; it is indeed to be hoped that England will not again, as then, sully her fame by a cowardly drawing back from the responsibilities she has undertaken, and sacrifice

the unfortunate populations that put faith in the words of Englishmen. The thousands of refugees who are now so anxious to return to this rich land, which has at last been recovered from Dervish terrorism by the troops of the Khedive, evidently trust us again this time. They must have short memories, these men of Kosheh and Ginnis, if when looking at their ruined homes they do not feel some misgivings as to the future.

I rode over the battle-fields of Kosheh and Ginnis with an officer who had taken part in both actions. He pointed out to me the famous black rock by the river bank, within a hundred yards of our fort, from which the Dervishes for weeks poured a galling fire into the little garrison. The forts still stand, and I could see the barracks of the British troops, the strong earthworks that had been thrown up during the investment, and the covered ways to the river. Thousands of empty beef-tins strewn over the sand, here as in many places all over the Sudan, mark the former occupation of the British soldiery. Englishmen may well feel proud of the gallant fights that were fought on these plains in 1885 by the British and Egyptian troops, but ought to recall with feelings of shame the disastrous policy then pursued by our Government. In June 1885 we evacuated Dongola, despite the protests and warnings of Lord Wolseley, which have been so fully justified by events. It was then decided that Kosheh should be the frontier outpost; so the strong mud fort, whose ruins I beheld rising from the sandy waste, was

built among what were then green, carefully irrigated fields, and it was garrisoned by British and Egyptian troops. Encouraged by our abandonment of the country, the Dervish hosts now pressed on under Nejumi, bent on the conquest of Egypt. It was here on the new frontier, that we met the advancing army of the Khalifa and held it in check. Our small garrisons successfully resisted the Dervish attacks on Ambigol and Kosheh. Then, reinforcements having arrived, we gave the enemy battle at Ginnis on December 30, and completely routed Nejumi's forces, and stayed the invasion for awhile. We had left the rich province of Mahass to the mercy of the Dervishes; but it was taken for granted that our miserable retirement had ended at Kosheh; that this would be the permanent frontier post; and the trusting population of this province of Sukkot considered themselves safe under our protection. They were shortly undeceived, for to their dismay the British Government decided that the frontier should be withdrawn northwards yet another hundred miles; and in April 1886, Wady Halfa, the most unsuitable place from the military point of view that could have been selected, became the frontier post. Then the Dervishes overran fertile Sukkot, and soon left it the uninhabited, uncultivated wilderness we now find it. Our next step was to withdraw all the British troops from Nubia and to leave the defence of the frontier to the Egyptians, with the result, of course, that the Dervishes, emboldened by our retirement, which they attributed

to cowardice, renewed their invasions, harassed our frontiers, and for years made raids with impunity on the Nile-side villages almost as far north as Assuan itself. It appears that there are people in England who would like our Government to repeat this policy. Do they realize that as we retire the Dervishes destroy the population and make deserts behind us, and that, were we out of the country, the Nile valley would at once be laid waste by the savage Baggara for many hundreds of miles further north than they have ever ventured yet? Were it not for the British, the Khalifa, even now, tottering though be his power, could undertake an invasion of Egypt with every prospect of success.

XIV

FERKEH, *July* 1.

IF reports that have reached us from Omdurman are correct the Khalifa has not lost his knack of boastful oratory. As soon as he had read Bishara's letter announcing the disaster at Ferkeh, he ordered all the big war drums to be beaten so as to collect the people. He then issued from the strange mansion with its immense triple enclosure, wherein this tyrant dwells protected by his large bodyguard, mounted a horse, and rode down to the Nile bank. Drawing his sword, he turned to the assembled multitude and told the story of Ferkeh, with variations of his own, underrating the magnitude of the disaster, and representing that the "enemies of God" would have been destroyed had the Emirs obeyed his instructions and been watchful, and not quarrelled among each other as if they had been inspired by the Evil One. In a loud voice he preached the Jehad to the people, and prophesied that the Mahdist cause would prove victorious in this war. With vehement words he attempted to raise the enthusiasm of the faithful, and to stir the embers of the dying fanaticism. He declared that

he would at once send reinforcements to his beloved Wad Bishara at Dongola, 7000 of the bravest Dervish warriors, under the command of the two distinguished Emirs who had recently so signally defeated the Italians. Further on I will give the Khalifa's own description of this imaginary victory. It is impossible to say whether these brave words of the Khalifa will be followed by any action on his part. He often talks to the people in this strain. When the news of the fall of Kassala reached him he declaimed in this way, and announced that he would do great things—the scene is described in Slatin Pasha's book—but made no attempt to fulfil his boast. Surrounded as he is by enemies awaiting their opportunity to crush him, he will scarcely venture to despatch a large force of his Baggara to Dongola. It appears, moreover, that Bishara has no intention of holding any position to the north of Dongola, for he has now withdrawn the men he recently sent to Kermeh, and has carried south all the grain stored at that post for the supply of the Dervish troops.

A good deal more Dervish correspondence has fallen into the hands of our Intelligence Department. Some of these letters are very interesting as revealing the true condition of the Sudan and the present policy of the Khalifa. From the following letter, written by Bishara at Dongola on March 22, it will be seen that the Dervish leader had by that early date received intimation of the projected advance of the Egyptian troops. Now

the order to occupy Akasheh had only been telegraphed to Colonel Hunter at Wady Halfa a week before, and in accordance with his instructions he kept the matter secret, and even the officers that were to accompany him were not informed as to what was to be done until the last moment. There can be no doubt that the Khalifa maintains many watchful spies in Egypt, and State secrets reach him so rapidly that probably some of the native clerks in the Government departments are in his pay. This is Bishara's letter :—

In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate; praise be unto God, the generous governor, and praise be unto our Lord Mohammed and his family. From the servant of the Lord, Mohammed Bishara, to all Companions of the faith in the station of Suarda. May God be with you and guard you, Amen. After salutation, the mercy of God and his blessings be with you. I inform you that I have received reliable information that the enemies of God are advancing towards you with their army, which, by the help of God, is incapable in war. I have informed Hamuda of this. But now ye are of the protectors of the faith who give up their lives for the satisfaction of God the Lord of worlds. You have no occupation except the Jehad; it was for this you gave your allegiance to the Mahdi—peace be unto him—and to the Khalifa of the Mahdi—peace be unto him. You have bound yourselves with covenants and oaths to this effect. You must fulfil these oaths, more especially as you are the honourable noblemen and the mighty brethren whose services have been extolled, whose undertakings have met with success. You are of those who have pleasure in meeting God and waging the holy war against the infidels, for the excellent reason that God has prepared a splendid and bountiful reward for you. For all the above reasons, brethren, and because of the present movement against you of the forsaken of God, it is my wish that you should now be in readiness, and make complete preparations for upholding the faith, so that you may with exceeding energy and

high courage encounter these God-forsaken, and so duly carry on the Jehad of God and please God by such Jehad. Unite; love one another; obey implicitly the orders and prohibitions of the honourable Hamuda Idris in all matters of religion. May God bless you and show that he takes pleasure in all you undertake.

Numerous letters from Bishara to Hamuda have been found in which the latter is urged to attack us frequently, to be ever on the watch, and to keep Bishara well informed as to our movements. All these instructions appear to have been persistently disregarded by Hamuda, and it was perhaps well for him that he fell in the battle. The following is a characteristic letter from Bishara, dated April 14:—

From the servant of his Lord, Mohammed Bishara, to the two honourable Emirs, Hamuda Idris and Osman Azrak. I bring to your notice that I have received reliable information from within the enemy's camp at Akasha to the effect that the enemies of God collected there are for the most part Sudanese, and that some of these blacks are deserters from us, having served under the martyr Abdurrahman Wad el Nejumi; the rest of these troops are Egyptians. It is said that they have built a fort near Akasha, and have placed within it the Kababish Arabs. I have already in my letters ordered you to attack these enemies of God. I wish you to execute my orders; for the enemy, unless they see some of their number slain, will not take alarm; moreover, after your vigorous attack the Sudanese soldiers are certain to desert to you. Hasten then to fall on the enemy; for it is said they have the vile intention of attacking you. Attack them; defeat them severely and frequently. At the same time be on your guard and watch. Send scouts in all directions. Send me information—you are neglecting to do so now, though you have plenty of camels. Do all you can to destroy the enemy. Thank God you have a sufficiency of men with you who are determined and valorous.

The next letter, of which I give a translation, is important, as illustrating the new line of policy now pursued by the crafty Khalifa. When he thought his power was secure he encouraged his own powerful tribe, the hated Baggara, to place under their subjection the whole population of the Sudan. They ruled the land with a rod of iron, and treated Mahdists of other tribes with insolent contempt. Theirs was all the plunder, and all commands of any importance were reserved for Baggara Emirs. So as to make it impossible for these other tribes to organize a revolt, the Khalifa imprisoned or executed their principal Emirs; and Reggaf, his most southern post, became a convict colony, to which were sent all such influential persons as were considered dangerous by the tyrant. But now, of a sudden, in this hour of extreme peril, the Khalifa has reversed his policy, or, rather, has made a show of doing so. Surrounded by disaffected populations which long for his downfall and loathe his Baggara, finding also that his hold on his own tribesmen is loosening (now that he has no more spoil to offer them), the Khalifa has to look in all directions for support. He is therefore now attempting—too late, for his hypocritical professions deceive no one—to conciliate the local populations whom he has for years so cruelly oppressed, hoping that they will fight for him. For example, he has recently pretended to investigate what the Baggara plunderers are pleased to call taxation, and has enjoined some of his governors to see that the people are not

called upon to pay more than is just; for his one object on earth, he now declares, is the welfare of all those who are faithful to the Mahdist cause. He gently reprimands his Baggara for despising and domineering over people who, though not Baggara, are, after all is said, faithful servants of God like themselves. He has released the Jaalin and Danagla Emirs whom he has for so long confined in chains in Reggaf, and now honours them and places them in important posts. Alarmed at the present exodus north of the population of his frontier province, he finally took a bold step, by which, no doubt, he hopes to win back the loyalty of many who are now preparing to desert him. Dissatisfied with the conduct of Hamuda, his own cousin, he decided to deprive him of his command, and appointed as his successor, to command all the forces on the frontier, not one of the Baggara Emirs, as would always have been the case hitherto, but one of the despised Danagla, Osman Idris (better known as Osman Azrak, the frontier raider). But a short time since the Baggara would have scorned to fight under a man of this race, and would not have taken orders from him. Even now to place Osman in so high and responsible a position was to risk a mutiny of the Baggara, and that the Khalifa adopted so perilous a course proves that he must be in a very difficult and critical position. Osman's appointment was conveyed to him only two days before the fight at Ferkeh in a letter from Bishara. Reading between the lines, one gathers

from it how grave must be the dissensions among the Emirs of the Khalifa.

This letter, dated May 28, runs as follows :—

From the servant of his Lord, Mohammed Bishara, to the dear assistant of God, Osman Mohammed Issa. I inform you, beloved one, that owing to the high opinion I have of you, and to my belief that you do your duty in the *rubat* (station), I have asked the Lord of all, the Khalifa, to place you in chief command of the station. Thank God, he, our guide to our God, the Khalifa, has granted my request; the order has been given appointing you chief in command of the station. You will, therefore, do your utmost to support religion and so cut the tongues of those who envy you. Do not forget that those who would rejoice at your misfortunes are numerous, so beware of neglecting your duties. When I withdrew Saleh Ezzubair I appointed Hamuda, hoping that he would carry on the work to my satisfaction. But he did not carry out my orders; he has therefore been superseded, and you have been given his place; though numerous other brethren, Baggara Emirs among them, might have been appointed. But I would choose no one but you as commander of the station, for I believe in you. Do your very best, and remember that those who would rejoice at any shortcomings on your part will watch your doings; and if they find the least fault in you they will exult, and the blame will fall on me as well as on you. Thank God, you have a sufficiency of men under you. Hold them together. Fear God in secret as well as openly. Treat your troops without showing partiality, conduct yourself well in their presence, and if any one commits the least fault or disobeys your orders submit the matter at once to me secretly. Do your utmost to procure information, despatch scouts, and send me promptly and frequently all the news you can gather.

We were therefore wrong in supposing that Hamuda was in command of the Dervishes when we attacked their position at Ferkeh.

The following letter from the Khalifa himself describes the imaginary victory over the Italians

to which I have alluded; it will serve as an example of the many inventions with which the Khalifa is now endeavouring to revive the dead fanatical spirit of the people. The letter is dated April 10. After the usual prayers and salutations, it proceeds thus:—

From the servant of the Lord, the Khalifa Abdullah Ben Mohammed, Khalifa of the Siddik, to the honourable Mohammed Bishara, may God be with him, Amen. I inform you that the honourable Ahmed Fidil has been besieging the enemies of God in the *geiga* (garrison) of Kassala. When he pressed the siege the infidels received reinforcements under their now slain chief. They all made a sortie on the Companions, who bravely stood; and in the fight that ensued God sent down his victory to the Companions, so that the enemies of God were wholly defeated. Among the infidels killed is their chief, who is called Julnar (General?). His head and the heads of other chiefs with him were cut off, and have been sent here with their wicked baggage as a sign of the victory of the Faith. I write you this to give you the good news.

XV

KOSHEH CAMP, *July* 8.

ON July 5 the headquarter camp near Ferkeh was broken up and the troops were moved some six miles up the river to the ruined village of Kosheh. Now that the cholera is slowly but surely creeping up the river after us, there were good reasons for abandoning this camp which we had occupied for nearly a month; the numbers of dead Dervishes, camels, and horses which the burial parties had but very superficially buried in the surrounding sands, and the impossibility of exacting from natives of Africa a strict observance of hygienic regulations, combined to produce a distinctly insanitary state of things in the camp, and of this the sense of smell gave us full warning. Moreover, there was a good deal of dysentery among the troops, which rendered the change all the more desirable. The dysentery is attributed to the unwholesomeness of the Nile water at this season. At the commencement of the rise the water is green and has a foul odour, being the overflow of the stagnant equatorial swamps, and is also full of filth that has been washed off the flooded shores. The river is steadily rising, and we

hope in a few days to see it change its tint to the rich red brown of the bigger rise, when the water becomes quite wholesome.

The new camp is pleasantly situated and every precaution is being taken to keep it scrupulously clean. It commences at the famous black rock of Kosheh—from behind whose cover, in 1885, the Dervish riflemen, day after day, opened a harassing fire on the British garrison in the fort—and extends for 2000 yards down the river bank. Near the middle of the camp, among the ruins of the old fort, our engineers are now clearing the ground on which will shortly be constructed the railway station, the workshops, and the landing-stage. It is here that the new gunboats which are coming out in sections will be put together and launched. The soldiers of the Khedive, whether they be fellahin or blacks, are skilled in all the shifts of camp life; the fatigue parties soon made all trim and comfortable in the new encampment, and within a few hours of our arrival the long rows of *tokuls* had risen—huts built of wood and *halfa* grass, in the construction of which these men are very expert—while each section of the camp was enclosed in its own zariba of thorn bush. The newspaper correspondents have been allotted a section with a river frontage of fifty yards and a depth of 100 yards, the *tokuls* in which we live being among the date-palms fringing the edge of the steep river bank. A broad stretch of sand and stones now lies between us and the water, but the rising Nile later on will

cover this and fill its great channel up to the very brim of the bank.

Despite the cholera, all preparations for the further advance are being vigorously pushed on. The railway formation has been completed between Ferkeh and Kosheh, and it is now being extended across the desert to Sadin Fanti, for the line will not follow the long loop of the Nile at the centre of which is Suarda. Before the formation can be carried further, Sadin Fanti, which is thirty miles above Suarda, will of course have to be occupied, and it is rumoured that this will shortly be done by the North Staffordshire Regiment. The country round Sadin Fanti has already been reconnoitred by the cavalry. The long trains of camels are still ever pouring along the Nile bank southwards with supplies; the transport between this and Suarda is now to a great extent carried on by the numerous boats captured from the Dervishes. I saw a large fleet of these craft set sail together the other evening. It was a pretty sight; they started in a dense crowd under picturesque lateens, or curious narrow, oblong sails slung obliquely across the masts; then they gradually separated, each taking her own course to wind in and out among the many rocks and shoals that obstruct the navigation in the reaches near Ferkeh. Each boat was manned by the crew that had been captured with her, and carried a guard of a few soldiers to prevent any treachery on the part of the men; not that they are likely to play false, for being of the local population they

have no affection for the Dervishes, and are apparently quite content to work for the Government which treats them well and gives them good pay. While on the subject of transport I may mention that every one here speaks in terms of the very highest praise of the services rendered by Captain Drage, the Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General for supplies and stores. It is due to his untiring energy and complete mastery of his work, down to its smallest detail, that this expeditionary force has been ever kept so well supplied with everything needful, despite the many great difficulties that beset the undertaking. Captain Drage was ably assisted by his staff officers—Lieutenant Blunt, for example, who was in charge of each advanced depôt as we pushed on.

As for the cholera we shall probably soon have some cases in this camp; for, though a five days' quarantine has been established between Kosheh and the infected districts, regulations as strict as those generally enforced elsewhere would be impracticable here. We are compelled to keep up a constant communication with the infected districts; in this desolated country an army cannot support itself; all our supplies have to come from the north, so it is necessary that convoys should be allowed to pass through without delay, and it would not be practicable to fumigate or otherwise disinfect these thousands of tons of stores and forage. But everything that can be done, in these circumstances, to check the progress of the disease is being done by

the authorities. The cholera has assumed a mild form, and it is improbable that we shall have a serious epidemic. When the red water comes down the Nile and cleanses the foreshore of the filth now accumulated there cholera ought to disappear; it is difficult to see how it could remain long in a climate so dry and healthy, with the wind, from whichsoever quarter it blows, coming straight over the great desert, purer than the sea itself. So far the cholera has advanced steadily up the river—from Assuan to Korosko, from Korosko to Halfa, and thence to Ambigol Wells, Akasheh, and to the present rail head, about twelve miles from here. As soon as it appeared at Halfa the Staffordshire Regiment was moved to another camp at Gemai. Notwithstanding this precaution the disease has now broken out among the men.

I have only heard of one fatal case so far among the Englishmen attached to the expedition; but the life that was thus lost was a very valuable one. The first of our countrymen to fall victim to the cholera, was Mr. Vallom, chief superintendent of engines and workshops. He had held this post at Halfa for eleven years; a man of most lovable disposition, he will be missed by many comrades; it was principally owing to his great skill and indefatigable energy that the railway from Halfa has been kept working at all these last three months, despite the blunders of the untrained engine-drivers and other native subordinates, the constant breakdowns on the new line, and other obstacles. It will

be impossible, they all say here, to replace such a man, and I think it very likely that our transport will be much retarded by his death. The Staffordshire Regiment has had very bad luck throughout. After remaining three summer months on the sands of hot, dusty Wady Halfa it was left behind when we advanced, and took no part in the fight at Ferkeh; and now on the top of this bitter disappointment it is sent to a cholera camp in the desert, where the men have no means of whiling away the dreary weeks. When the men of the Staffordshire first heard of the Ferkeh fight—and the story as it reached them had lost nothing in the telling—they were so exasperated at having been left out of the "fun" that they became somewhat riotous on coming off parade, and "threw their things about"—to quote my informant's words—when they got into barracks. One man declared in bitter jest that the next time he enlisted he would paint himself black and go into a Sudanese regiment, as then he would have a fair chance of being in a fight. This is the right spirit for a soldier, and it is to be hoped that this fine regiment will take its part in the next engagement.

There is but little news from Dongola. In my last letter I spoke of the Khalifa's recent attempts to conciliate the local population, of his hypocritical professions of love towards them, and of his promise that for the future they should be lightly taxed and treated as brethren by the Baggara. He has apparently failed to snare them with this transparent

device; it is too late now to win them back to his cause; the people cannot forget the past years of oppression, they cannot trust the tyrant. Realizing this the Khalifa has again reversed his policy and has given orders that the local populations should be treated with greater severity than ever. An Arab refugee of the Kababish tribe came in here a few days ago and gave the following account of the present condition of things in the province of Dongola; other fugitives quite confirm his statements. According to him, Wad el Bishara, Governor of Dongola, announced that the Nile Arabs and local populations were traitors to Mahdism and were unwilling to fight the enemies of God. As they could not be trusted to fight, they would be compelled to support the Jehad in another way—they should contribute the food necessary for the loyal Baggara warriors. Bishara then sent bodies of men all over the country, who surrounded the villages and seized all the cattle and all the grain, leaving none for the support of the people, but paying to each owner of property taken a nominal sum, saying, "You see that the Khalifa is a just and merciful man." Practically all the provisions in the province are thus being carried up to the town of Dongola, where they are stored in the Beit-ul-Mal, or public warehouse. As the wily Wad el Bishara intended, numbers of the wretched people, deprived of every means of subsistence, repaired to Dongola, where they are permitted to purchase some of their own grain back at an exorbitant price. Others, having

no money, are dying of starvation. Some, of stouter heart than their fellows, run the gauntlet of Dervish posts placed on all the roads leading north, and are either slain in the attempt or succeed in escaping to our lines, where, for the present, they are being supplied with food by our commissariat.

Osman Azrak is still collecting and sending up grain from Abu Fatma; but he is so fearful of the "enemies of God" after his experiences at Ferkeh that he always takes the precaution of sleeping on an island with his steamer moored hard by with her steam up. Bishara himself vows that even if abandoned by all he will die alone fighting in Dongola, and he would, no doubt, keep his word. But even among the brave Baggara many have lost heart since the 7th of June, and are disinclined to sacrifice their lives in heroic but hopeless resistance against overwhelming odds. Abd-el-Azim's recent report, the substance of which I telegraphed, tends to show this. This gallant Ababdeh chief—whose good services to the Government I described in a letter from Murat Wells when I found him in command of his Arab irregulars—was present at Ferkeh fight, and, accustomed as he was to the wild Arab method of fighting, he was amazed to observe how destructive a machine is a disciplined army. Immediately after the fight he set out with some of his Ababdeh and made a demonstration in the same districts he visited nearly three months ago. He followed the Nile for many miles in the neighbourhood of the fourth cataract, and announced the

victory to the local populations, who received the news with shouts of joy, reckless of what punishment the Dervishes might inflict on them, for they felt their delivery to be near. In one village he found a party of forty Baggara who fled at his approach without firing a shot, and escaped to the island of Sherri.

XVI

KOSHEH CAMP, *July* 22.

WE have now, south of Halfa, in this frontier wilderness, far from the base of our supplies, quite 20,000 mouths to feed, including civilian followers of the expedition, and, as our transport service has necessarily been considerably impeded by the outbreak of cholera along our entire line of communication, it is possible that our halt at Kosheh will be somewhat more prolonged than was at first expected; but all who know the Sirdar are confident that he will push on as soon as he possibly can, and that will be when the Nile has sufficiently risen to allow some of the steamers to get over the cataracts and reach this place. In the meanwhile we remain in camp, watching as patiently as we can the gradually rising waters, and correspondents (who are not allowed to accompany any of the reconnaissances) have little to record beyond the daily cholera returns and such reports and rumours from Omdurman and Dongola as the Intelligence Department thinks proper to impart.

Correspondents are permitted to travel as far south as Suarda, so another correspondent and

myself decided to ride to that outpost on June 9. The distance from Kosheh to Major Macdonald's camp (which, as a matter of fact, is not at Suarda, but three miles to the south of it) is about thirty-five miles by the route usually followed; but we contrived to go considerably out of our way, and had ridden about forty-four miles before we reached the camp. Some of us have recently gone to Suarda by boat, for it is pleasant to get away from the hot, dusty camel track and scud up the river before the strong north wind which now blows regularly each day from about ten in the morning until sunset. Realizing that she would be of great service to us for transport purposes, my companion and myself purchased a native sailing-boat at Halfa about two months ago, provided her with new gear, a large lateen sail and an awning, loaded her with stores, and left her in charge of an experienced reis and crew, who were instructed to sail her up to us so soon as the Nile had risen to a sufficient height. But, alas! when in due time all the other boats reached Ferkeh, our aged reis arrived alone and on foot to announce to us, with a face full of gloom, that our little vessel had struck a rock while she was being towed across the Wady Attera cataract and had gone down with her cargo. Of all the many boats that undertook the same voyage at that time ours alone was lost.

As the road to Suarda is considered to be safe, we were not ordered to accompany a convoy, neither were we provided with an escort, so we

SONKI BY MOONLIGHT: INSIDE THE ZAREBA.

cantered off early in the morning with the intention of breakfasting at Amara, a village twelve miles distant, where a post has been established to guard the road. We rode over the hard sand, often crossing the ridges and furrows of what were once irrigated fields. On our left was the open desert, extending to a range of weird volcanic peaks a few miles distant, huge pyramids of black, calcined, and crumbling rock, streaked with fan-shaped shoots of dazzling sand. On our right stretched the broad belts of date-palms fringing the river bank, among which we saw the huts of the former cultivators of the soil, long since dispossessed by the Dervishes, and here and there the white dome of some neglected little mosque. We travelled on for about two hours, but saw no signs of a military post. At last, perceiving a large ruined village among the palms, we took it to be Amara and rode into it. It was evident that it had once been an important place. The belt of cultivation is here broader than elsewhere, while by the river-side there is a large and dense grove of date-palms and other trees, among which nestle the houses. Many of these are of considerable size, two storeys in height, with turrets, and have well-built staircases, arched gateways and windows, in the construction of which blocks of sandstone have been used, probably taken from some ancient temple in the neighbourhood; but all these deserted habitations are roofless. Since leaving Assuan I have seen no village to compare with this, and its ruins testify to the former pros-

perity of this fertile province whose fields and groves are now abandoned to wild animals—creatures that have for so many years been unmolested by man that they have lost fear of him; the hyena is the only enemy they know, so that the gazelles often allow us to come close to them, while the sand grouse do not stir from the ground as one canters by within two or three yards of the pack.

This apparently deserted village was a pleasant place after the hot, glaring desert, for we rode in a subdued green light under the fronds of the palms which, meeting overhead in graceful arches, shaded the houses, while beneath our feet was long green grass which filled up all the spaces between the houses and also grew within some of them on the never-trodden floors. We rode on for fully a mile by these habitations, and still to our astonishment we met no soldiers and saw no signs of an encampment. At last, when near the further end of the village, we caught sight of some human beings—women and children with but a few rags thrown over them, who flitted away like startled bats at our approach. Then we came to some inhabited huts and found a group of half-naked, rather villanous-looking Berberi men squatting on the ground. We asked them whether this was the village of Amara. "You have passed Amara," they replied, "this is Abri," and then we realized that we had ridden four miles beyond Amara and were off our road, for Abri is in the centre of a deep loop of the Nile, which is avoided by the camel track. It is, no doubt, because

it is thus remote from the frequented route that Abri has lately been left undisturbed by Dervishes, and that we here found a small remnant of the original population in possession of a certain number of goats and fowls and a little grain; but they had not cultivated the land for some time, as Dervish requisitions had left them without any oxen to turn their water-wheels. We also found at Abri a number of refugees from the villages south of Suarda, who have been sent here by the military authorities to remain until our further advance makes it possible for them to return to their own homes. For the present the Government supplies them with food. Rejoiced as they undoubtedly are to be freed from the Khalifa's oppression, these men wore an air of gloom; they received us as if they were scarcely pleased to see us, and to our questions they returned but short and sullen replies. We afterwards ascertained the reason for this attitude on their part. Though, in consequence of our rapid advance, the Dervishes had no time to impress the populations of these villages and drive them south, they were yet able to seize and carry off nearly all the village sheikhs, who now remain as hostages in the Khalifa's hands. The people are, therefore, somewhat afraid to have dealings with us, knowing that, should a report of their friendliness towards us come to the Khalifa's ears, their sheikhs would pay the penalty; their position is a difficult one, and they naturally entertain misgivings as to the future. When the refugees, reassured as to the intentions of

the Government, return to their lands the now bare earth round Abri will, no doubt, be once more green with irrigated crops; but it is easy to foresee that the Government will have difficulty in settling the disputes that are certain to arise as to the ownership of the rich lands that border the Nile in this province. Berberi refugees in Cairo have been selling their properties in this country to Greek speculators; false claims are already being put in, and the lands of absent or dead men are being "jumped" by Berberi scoundrels.

Finding that we had ridden past Amara we turned back and still had some difficulty in discovering that village. In this desolated region ruined houses extend all along the river bank, and there is nothing to show where one village ends and another begins. As before, we saw no signs of a military post as we rode along the desert, for the river-side belt of palms and high bush completely concealed from our view the camp of the troops (cavalry and camel corps) now stationed at Amara. But at last we came across some soldiers who put us on our way; we entered the camp and had breakfast with Captain Green-Wilkinson, of the camel corps, before resuming our journey. From Amara the road, avoiding the bend of the Nile, crosses the desert for about ten miles, to rejoin the river at Koyekeh, near which we have a small cavalry post under the command of an Egyptian officer. After riding a short distance beyond the post we came to a really imposing monument known as the tomb of the Morghani

sheikh. A great white dome rising in a series of terraces, its lower portion built of sandstone blocks, stands in the centre of a grove of date-palms and large acacias, whose deliciously fresh green foliage is the haunt of a multitude of singing birds. There are signs to show that the faithful once irrigated the soil, so that the shrine should be surrounded by a pleasant and ever-verdant garden. Within the dome is the grave of the saint, who had been a sheikh, and consequently a spiritual chief, of the Morghani family. This family, which is of Afghan descent, emigrated from Mecca to this country about a hundred years ago. The Morghani were the first Moslem missionaries to come to the heathen Sudan. Their efforts met with great success, they founded a sect which has a strong hold on the people, and the heads of the family are invested with spiritual as well as temporal authority. The Morghani have been cruelly persecuted by the Khalifa, and none have better cause than the members of this family to desire the destruction of the tyrant Abdullah. From the tomb a long ride over the sands, past several straggling villages, whence peered out at us the forlorn refugees, brought us to Suarda. We found the troops nearly three miles further on in the village of Iran, which we entered at 4 p.m., to be hospitably welcomed by our numerous friends among the officers.

The Commandant of this our southernmost camp is Major Macdonald, D.S.O., and here is now stationed the whole of the brigade he commands—

that 2nd Brigade which I accompanied throughout the Ferkeh fight, when the black battalions composing it swept the Baggara and Jaalin warriors off the strong positions which they held amongst the hills. The village of Iran, which extends for upwards of half a mile along the river from north to south, has been placed in a complete state of defence. The southern end of the village is occupied by the 12th battalion under the command of Major Townshend, of Chitral fame. The enemy's probable line of attack would be from the south, as they could advance up the river bank under cover of the palm-trees. Major Townshend has therefore strongly fortified this end of the village. On the desert side he has filled up the intervals between the outermost houses with walls of mud prepared for defence by loopholing or by banquette fire, and the southern side has been protected with a breastwork and ditch. The portion of the village occupied by this battalion has thus been practically converted into a fort, and within it an old keep and several houses have been demolished so as to have a clear space for the movement of the men in case of attack. On the south, outside the fortifications, a strong stockade presents a formidable obstacle to an enemy attempting an attack from the river bed, while in the desert to the east is a lunette with Maxims; and on some rising ground, which would otherwise have allowed an enemy to approach under cover, sheltered trenches have been dug. The troops are distributed through the village from south to north in the following

order:—The 12th Sudanese battalion; the Horse Artillery and Maxim batteries; Head-quarters; the 11th Sudanese battalion; the 13th Sudanese battalion. All down the line the huts have been joined together by walls prepared for defence in the manner I have described, while a stockade block-house in the desert to the north of the village completes the dispositions that have been made for the protection of this outpost.

I remained six days at Iran. On the 14th two officers, my companion of the journey up, and myself took one of the sailing-boats captured from the Dervishes and sailed ten miles up the Nile in order to visit two interesting Egyptian temples on the west bank of the river. Two soldiers were in the boat with us, and as it was expected that Dervishes were somewhere in the neighbourhood, we received orders from the Commandant not to land at the further temple until we saw on the bank a party of Kababish Arab irregulars which would be despatched from Suarda to act as our escort when on shore. We set out in the morning, and hoisting the ragged oblong sail scudded fast through the choppy sea raised by the conflicting wind and current—so choppy indeed was it that one of the two soldiers suffered from severe sea-sickness throughout the voyage. The tossing waves were of a rich red brown, for the true rise of the Nile had commenced—for the last week, by the way, we have been drinking a very muddy fluid! but at any rate it is quite wholesome and produces no sickness, as does

the green water of the early rise. We ran up the broad river between the belts of date-palms and the sand-hills, sometimes passing close to the low islands to get a shot at the plump geese which frequent them—as good-flavoured geese, by the way, as any in the world.

We landed at the first temple, opposite the village of Doshematto, and found it to be a cave temple, something like that of Abu Simbel, but without the magnificent carved figures of the latter. It is cut out of the face of a fantastically-shaped rocky bluff which projects into the river. From here another hour's sail before a strong breeze brought us to the second temple, which we saw, when yet far off, through an opening in the river-side palm groves—a cluster of reddish-yellow columns rising above the gleaming desert sands. Our Kababish escort was there before us, so we were able to land at once, and were met on the shore by about thirty men of that gallant desert tribe of which so small a remnant remains. I have in a former letter told how the Kababish were all but exterminated when fighting the Dervishes on our account under their brave chief Saleh—like the rest, they were left by our Government to the Khalifa's mercy! The men of our escort were mounted on camels and armed with Remingtons like our other irregulars. We wondered at the time that so strong an escort had been provided for us; but there was some reason for this precaution; it was afterwards discovered that a patrol of twenty Dervish camelmen were within

three miles of us while we were examining the temple. Of the temple the exceedingly beautiful and massive sandstone columns alone remain standing, but they suffice to show that this must have been one of the grandest temples in ancient Egypt. We observed that the carved figures and hieroglyphs on these columns were wonderfully sharp and well preserved on the south or lee side, whereas on the north or weather side the showers of sand that have been driven against the pillars for thousands of years by the prevailing wind have worn the surface completely smooth and obliterated every inscription. Lying prone among the fallen blocks of stone are shattered granite sphinxes. We picked up fragments of ancient pottery, but there was nothing to show that excavations had ever been conducted here. For the last twelve years, of course, no Europeans have set eyes on these ruins. The last visitors from our own country left their mark here after a characteristic fashion. Empty "bully" tins are strewn all over the ground, and on nearly all the pillars are carved the names of the privates of the 42nd Regiment, to remind one that the Black Watch halted here in the expedition of 1884.

On the 15th my companion and myself rode to Amara, and found that the 4th battalion had been advanced to that post. Captain Green-Wilkinson, with whom we passed the night, told us that the cholera had reached Kosheh camp and that one fatal case had occurred that morning at Amara. On the following morning we returned to Kosheh. For

nearly a fortnight this camp has been passing through the ordeal of a somewhat severe cholera epidemic, now happily subsiding. The disease at first assumed a virulent and rather unusual form, its course was extraordinarily rapid (a question, I believe, of minutes sometimes), and nearly every case proved fatal. In some cases the ordinary symptoms were absent; a man lay down in good health at night to be found dead in the morning by those sleeping close to him, who had not heard him utter a sound. In one case I know of a man, apparently quite well a moment before, who fell suddenly to the ground, seized by such violent and horrible symptoms that his agony was over at once. The correspondents' little camp has had more than its full share of the cholera. There are nine correspondents here, and with servants, boatmen, and other followers, we number about fifty in all. In three days we had six cases among these men, of which four cases proved fatal. Out of four Berberis whom I had engaged to build my hut, two died of cholera. One night while I was dining with a colleague, his servant, who was about to wait on us, was attacked by the usual symptoms and died within a few hours. Even strangers came to our camp to die and scatter germs; for one morning we found a dead Berberi, whom no one knew, lying dead outside our huts.

Surgeon-Captain Spong, who was the only English medical officer in this camp when the epidemic was at its height, and the handful of Syrian and Egyptian surgeons under him have had very hard and anxious

work and have done their duty heroically. Surgeon-Lieutenant-Colonel Gallwey, the principal medical officer of the Egyptian army, arrived here a few days ago and is taking vigorous measures to stamp out the cholera. He has earned a high reputation for having successfully combated the disease in previous epidemics. Natives unprovided with passes are now summarily ejected from the camp—a very necessary precaution, for there can be no doubt that the unclean followers of the army and the refugees settled in the villages who come into camp to seek work or sell provisions are chiefly responsible for the spread of the disease. The river bank has been entirely cleared of troops, and we are all encamped on high ground in the desert, 2000 yards from the Nile; while everything is done that can be done to prevent the men from drinking contaminated water.

We correspondents have naturally to do most of the police work in our own camp. Twice a day, for example, we send our camels to the river to bring up our drinking water, and we take it in turns to superintend the operation; for an Arab camel-driver despises what he considers to be our foolish prejudices, and, if left to himself, would fill our water-skins in the foul, stagnant pools at the river's edge. Our plan is to place the skins in a boat, sail out into the middle of the river, and draw our water in the full rush of the current—very muddy water, it is true, but innocent of cholera germs. The first day that it came to my turn to see that the watering was done properly the reis

of the boat developed cholera. He was promptly taken to the hospital, and has now recovered. His fellows welcomed him back as one returned from the other world, for up till then every man of their acquaintance who had caught the disease had succumbed to it, and they dreaded the hospital as the ante-chamber of the grave. The recovery of this boat-reis has produced a very good effect among our men. Seeing so many of their friends dying around them, and observing the frequency with which the stretchers bearing the muffled forms of the dead were being carried out of the hospital, they were evidently much scared, and, despite their Mahomedan fatalism, fell into a state of deep depression. We no longer heard the merry song and laughter of our light-hearted blacks, who went about their work listlessly and gloomily; while our more timid Berberi servants gave way to panic, and prayed their masters to allow them to return to their homes in the north—which was, of course, quite out of the question. But now, having seen that a man can have cholera and yet recover if promptly treated in the hospital, they are putting aside their fears and are regaining their old cheery spirit. We have done our utmost to put heart into the poor fellows—for fear is the cholera's strong ally—and our efforts have been successful. We have explained to them that the cholera—as usually happens—has expended its destructive energy, and is of a milder form, there being now a far larger proportion of recoveries; of the first 1000 cases

that occurred between this and Assuan among troops and civilians, nearly 800 ended fatally. When we brought down four soldiers with a stretcher to carry off our sick reis, so fearful was he of the hospital that he implored us to leave him where he was; and it was only when Mr. Scudamore rode into the water after him and threatened to employ actual force that we got him out of the boat. Any of his fellows would have then shown the same dread of the hospital, and they mourned him as one dead when he was carried off by our orders; but since his recovery this feeling no longer exists, and the men place implicit faith in the efficacy of the English *hakim's* drugs and treatment. This morning I had a proof of this change. I accompanied the water party, and when I reached the river another of the boatmen reported himself as having cholera symptoms, and expressed his anxiety to be at once taken to the hospital. If all the people in this country could be brought to act in this sensible manner—instead of crawling away into corners when seized by cholera, to die alone, and so to spread the infection far and wide—the epidemic would not live long in the pure desert air. Unfortunately, as soon as the epidemic has done its work at one place it leaps on to another, and it will probably follow the expedition up the river bank all the way to Dongola. The latest news is that it has broken out among the refugees in the villages near Suarda, both on the right and left banks of the river. There is nothing to prevent it from spreading like wild-

fire through a population so dirty in its habits. It is difficult enough to enforce the observance of sanitary regulations among the disciplined troops in this camp; it would be hopeless to attempt to do so in the villages.

It still remains altogether uncertain whether the Khalifa intends to defend Dongola. A boat with deserters from the enemy arrived at Suarda while I was there (as I have already stated in a telegram). They report that the grain collected by Osman Azrak at Kermeh and elsewhere is not being stored in Dongola, but is being sent south to the neighbourhood of Korti. This looks as if the Khalifa, realizing that he cannot, with safety to himself, despatch strong reinforcements to a place so far from Omdurman as the town of Dongola, is preparing for a retreat. After the crushing defeat of the Dervishes at Toski in 1889, the Khalifa, believing that the Government troops were about to make an immediate advance on Dongola, openly declared that he would oppose us there with an overwhelming force; but at the same time he gave secret instructions to Yunes to retire south, if threatened by us, and to make a stand at the southern extremity of the province. He may be repeating that policy at the present time. The Khalifa, though professing to have the future revealed to him in his inspired visions, is doubtless, like a good many other people, at a loss to know whether his enemies will be satisfied with the occupation of the Dongola province, or whether it is their object to push on still further.

He knows, however, that were his troops defeated at Korti, they could retreat on Khartum, without much fear of pursuit, by the well-known route across the Bayuda desert. Even were we in a position to pursue them, the Dervishes could make a stand at the wells of Gakdul, half-way to Metemmeh, where we should have to fight for water, or still further on at the historic wells of Abu Klea.

On the other hand later intelligence makes it seem probable that there will be a stand at Dongola. The Dervishes, possibly encouraged by our apparent inaction, have returned to their posts at Kermeh, which they abandoned after the fight at Ferkeh, while the presence of one of their patrols within a dozen miles of Suarda shows a renewed activity on their part. That some reinforcements have now reached Dongola is almost certain. For many reasons it is to be hoped that the Dervishes will make a resolute stand at Dongola; a strong blow struck there will save much future bloodshed, and embolden many of the oppressed tribes to come over to us. It will be disheartening, too, for the troops if they have no fighting after all they have gone through. During this tedious, though necessary delay, while cholera and dysentery are thinning the ranks, the men are working—as I have never seen soldiers work before—under the hot sun amid the desert sands, toiling as navvies on the railway construction, making wearisome marches with the convoys, labouring on various exhausting fatigue duties. They are worked as hard as they well can be, in short, and the neces-

sities of war presumably demand this, for we must get up supplies, and all preparations for the advance must be completed in good time. The men are beginning to have a haggard look, and many are evidently getting fagged out. But their patient endurance under these hardships is beyond all praise. Good troops do not shrink from hard work so long as it leads to the reward of a stout fight with the enemy at the end.

XVII

KOSHEH CAMP, *Aug.* 8.

HAD not the Dongola expedition been very carefully organized and skilfully conducted by officers of large experience in frontier warfare, the quite unforeseen accidents that have recently threatened to break down our transport service and to leave the army insufficiently provided with food, as well as decimated by disease, might well have led to disastrous results. Since the fight at Ferkeh ill-luck has certainly beset the expedition, severely testing all the arrangements and resources of the several departments; these, however, have not been found wanting, and the success of the undertaking has in no wise been jeopardized. From what I have seen in Madagascar and elsewhere, I am inclined to think that, had this expedition, in the present adverse circumstances, been directed by another European power less experienced in carrying on military operations at a great distance from a base in savage countries where no supplies are obtainable, a deplorable *fiasco* would probably have been the result. For a time indeed it almost seemed as if the forces of nature were combining to hold in check

and destroy the army of those whom the Mahdists are pleased to designate the "enemies of God," and that the Khalifa made no idle boast when he declared that in an inspired vision he had seen the Angels of Pestilence and numbers of the Heavenly Host fighting for the faithful against us. Our ill-luck has certainly been extraordinary. In the first place we have had a very late Nile. The river, on which we rely for our transport beyond this place, failed to rise at its usual season. We have been waiting for weeks by its banks, watching the water as it rises a few inches one day, only to fall again the next, but never rising to a sufficient height to allow our seven small stern-wheel steamers to pass the second cataract. Until the steamers do reach Kosheh there can be no advance on Dongola; for our camels, now reduced in number after their long marches through the sultry summer months (their dead-line the road), are insufficient for the needs of the expedition, and it must be remembered, moreover, that in this uncultivated region camel transport is most wasteful, as the animals have to carry the greater part of the forage they require in addition to their loads.

Then the cholera swept up the river from the Mediterranean and fell on all our camps in succession up to our furthest outpost, disjointing the arrangements on the line of communication, delaying all work of preparation, impeding transport; for it was necessary to isolate, as far as possible, infected districts and stamp out the disease. While it lasted

the cholera was of a most virulent nature, and spread consternation through the army. It was as if we were perpetually under fire from an unseen foe against whom we could not strike back a blow in our defence—a noiseless fire before which we saw our friends suddenly fall in their stalwart youth, in eight cases out of ten not to rise again. One spoke to a man who was strong and hearty, and later in the same day heard that he was dead; one morning, for example, I was breakfasting with one of the finest officers in the Egyptian army, when he was seized by the fatal symptoms, to die within a few hours. The cholera, even as if it were, in truth, as the Khalifa says it is, the instrument directed by Heaven to thwart the plans of the enemies of the Mahdi, has selected as its victims, out of the small body of Englishmen here, several officers whose services could least be spared and of whom I have spoken in former letters and telegrams. Most valuable lives, too, have been lost among the civilians. I have already recorded the death of Mr. Vallom, the superintendent of railway construction, which threw back all work on the railway and delayed the transport, for the place of such a man as he was could not be readily filled; and now yet another civil engineer of great experience, Mr. Nicholson, who had been sent from England to superintend the putting together of the sections of the new gunboat when they arrive here, has also died of cholera. It is no wonder that to the superstitious mind of the native it seemed that a

curse was on this expedition. Cholera, dysentery, and enteric fever were wofully thinning the ranks, and the last week of July—after which the health of the whole force improved—was the most fatal of all so far as our small body of Englishmen were concerned. On July 25 there died here of cholera Major M. A. C. Fenwick, Royal Lancashire Regiment, a splendid officer, of long and distinguished service in the Egyptian army, exceedingly popular with his brother officers and beloved by his gallant Sudanese of the 10th Regiment. On the same day, too, Surgeon-Captain S. E. Trask died of cholera on his arrival at Kosheh. He had been treating the cholera sick at Akasheh, and, as the epidemic had subsided there, had been sent to Kosheh to assist Surgeon-Captain Spong, who, being the only British medical officer in this camp while the epidemic was at its height, had been much overworked in his heroic execution of his duty. Then, on the 28th, died Lieutenant R. Polwhele, R.E., a young officer of untiring energy, who had been working for months all day under the fiery sun while superintending the railway construction. It was essential to the success of the expedition that the line should be pushed on as rapidly as possible, and it was literally devotion to his duty that killed him. He was greatly overworked, but would not allow himself to rest, so that the germs of enteric fever found in him an easier prey. Our little band of correspondents was not spared in that fatal week, for on the 28th also died of enteric fever our much-

esteemed and much-regretted colleague H. Garrett, the special correspondent of the *New York Herald*, whose amiable qualities had made him many friends in this camp. During the month of July the percentage of sick among the British officers—more especially among the overworked Engineers engaged on the railway construction—was high, alarmingly high indeed, if one included the men who persisted on carrying on their duties when they ought to have been placed on the sick list.

After that final week of July that cost us so many valuable lives, yet a third curse fell upon the expedition—a week of storm. For days the weather had been unusually sultry, when on July 30 a strong south wind arose, dust-storm after dust-storm swept over the desert and through the camp, laying low many of our straw huts, while the fleckless blue sky of the Sudan, of whose monotonous splendour men from northern climes so soon get weary, became overcast with dark clouds; a few heavy drops of rain fell and we heard thunder in the distance. This was the commencement of a spell of unsettled weather which has not yet come to an end, for as I write this the wind is howling and masses of dark cloud are driving across the heavens. Out here on the desert one might well imagine oneself to be standing on some sandy beach in Northern Europe during an autumnal gale, were it not for the temperature, a damp and very oppressive heat. Though the sun's rays do not reach us through the rolling vapours overhead, the thermometer is registering

from 104° to 108° in our huts. Each day the weather got worse, and as fast as the fatigue parties rebuilt our huts the wind blew them down again; while, though little rain fell, and that but occasionally, it was sufficient to convert the dense dust that filled the air into mud, which covered ourselves and everything we possessed with filth; for a straw hut of course affords no protection from rain. The flying dust we breathe and swallow in this windy weather is often offensive to the senses of taste and smell. Coming as it does from the various camping grounds we have occupied in this neighbourhood since the seventh of June, it must be full of the germs of disease, and is doubtless responsible for much of the dysentery and other disorders from which our force has suffered.

This is indeed an exceptional year. This region is marked on the maps as being within the rainless zone, and as a matter of fact it is five years since a drop of rain fell here, and nine years since there has been anything approaching to a heavy shower. But on August 2 the rough weather culminated in a storm of almost unprecedented violence. In the afternoon we saw a long black mass like a dense fog bank rise from the Eastern desert—a huge wall of driving dust that gradually advanced upon our camp. "The *haboub!*" cried our servants, who at once bustled about to prepare for this unwelcome visitor. At first the sultry air was quite still; but occasionally, detaching itself from the dusky cloud, a sand devil marched down upon us, a great column

of rapidly-whirling sand, that sucked into its vortex bits of wood and other light substances, and casting them upwards carried them along with it, fluttering wildly at the summit of its crest. If the sand devil happened to strike tent or *tokul*, it threw it to the ground. Next the strong wind came down upon us —a parching, choking, suffocating blast of mingled hot dry air, sand, dust, and straw, that was almost palpable, so full it was of particles of solid matter. The camp became a scene of confusion. Here one saw men holding on to the posts of a swaying hut, in vain attempting to save it from destruction; here others being dragged across the desert as they clutched the ropes of a tent that had got adrift and which was scudding before the wind like an inflated balloon; here a correspondent running after the flying pages of his scattered article. Then the thunder pealed out and vivid lightnings flashed across a sky by this time covered with one great pall of cloud, from which the large raindrops began to fall, first slowly, but soon in a noisy downpour such as I have often seen thrash the Equatorial sea in the region of the doldrum calms. And now the camp became one large quagmire of filthy mud, giving out a foul smell; the water, or rather liquid mire, poured through the roofs of our straw huts, soaking and defiling everything within, and converting our floors into dirty pools. Every dry *khor*, or gully, in the desert became a deep, rushing torrent of brown water hurrying to the Nile; the correspondents' camp was converted into a muddy island cut off

from communication with the other camps by broad streams four or five feet in depth. Below us the railway embankment had dammed up the water, forming a long lake nearly half-a-mile in breadth, which must have been quite ten feet deep in places; a great portion of the embankment would have been swept away had not our Engineer officers opened a trench through it, and so allowed the imprisoned flood to escape. This storm lasted for a considerable time, and left us all damp, dirty, and uncomfortable. It was feared that a recrudescence of cholera and dysentery, and an outbreak of fever would follow the rain; but, so far, this has not been the case, though the soaked soil gives out a very offensive smell in places, more especially in the cholera and other burial grounds. It is fortunate that we had abandoned our former insanitary and crowded camp, under the palm-trees by the river, before this heavy rain fell; our present camp among the sands and stones of the desert, where the troops are spread over a large surface of ground, is admirably situated from the hygienic point of view, and precautionary measures which it was not possible to enforce while we were on the river bank are rigorously observed here. We now learn that this extraordinary storm extended over a great portion of the Eastern desert. The rain filled to the brim the wells of Murat and all the natural reservoirs which I described in a former letter. The Ababdeh report that there is now a sufficiency of water thus stored in the districts they patrol to supply a large body of men for many

years—a matter of great importance if it is decided later on to construct the Korosko-Abu Hamed railway. The rain has also fallen heavily at Suarda and Akasheh, and the quantity of water that has been poured over this thirsty land must have been enormous. It has completely changed the climate for the time; and, as the soldiers say, complaining of the moist heat, "it is as bad here as at Suakin."

But the different scourges that have brought affliction to the "enemies of God" have apparently done their worst now, and we can look hopefully to the future of this expedition. In the first place, though the storm broke down the railway embankment at some points, the damage was rapidly repaired by gangs of hard-working Egyptian and Sudanese soldiers under our ever-energetic Engineer officers. The rain may have spoilt some of the grain, forage, and biscuit that were on the road or were lying exposed on the sands of our *muzzle*, or commissariat store, at Kosheh; but I understand that the loss has been insignificant. The storm, moreover, was not an unmixed evil; those who know this country best say that so rare an occurrence cannot fail to greatly encourage our Arab allies and such tribes under the Khalifa's rule as are anxious for his overthrow, while it will spread a corresponding dismay among his Baggara supporters. Of all their superstitions none has a firmer hold on the Arabs than the belief that for a stranger coming from afar to bring rain with him into a country is a sure sign of his good fortune, a proof

that he is favoured by the Almighty and will be wholly successful in the undertaking on which he is engaged at the time.

As for the turbid Nile, its behaviour has been capricious and most exasperating. After rising to a height almost sufficient to allow of the passage of the steamers through the second cataract, it has now fallen again several inches and is still falling as I write. An attempt is being made to haul the seven stern-wheel steamers up the cataract, but they are at present detained in the second reach of the rapids. How indispensable these steamers are may be gathered from the fact that they can carry in one voyage nearly a fortnight's supplies for the whole force, so that when once they have crossed this cataract—the one great obstacle to the navigation of the Nile—our transport difficulties will be practically at an end. The whistle of the railway locomotive is now heard at Kosheh itself—the terminus for the time—and the new engines that are to be placed on the line will enable heavy trains to bring up quantities of supplies daily. It is now a question whether the sections of the new gunboat and her armament will not arrive here by rail before the tardy Nile permits the seven old steamers to reach us. The river ought certainly to resume its rise again soon, but, after the tricks it has recently played with us, no one here now ventures to prophesy as to what the Nile will do next. As for our most serious trouble of all, the cholera, there seems to be little doubt that it has at last been practically stamped

out, and for this great credit is due to our admirable staff of very hard-worked medical officers. Gallwey Bey, the principal medical officer of the Egyptian army, who is now here, is quite satisfied with the present condition of this camp. The health of the troops is better than it has been for some time and is improving daily.

There are signs to show that we shall advance before this letter reaches England. It is doubtful whether there are more than 4000 men at Dongola in whom the Khalifa's Emirs can place any reliance. The Dervish post at Kermeh, abandoned after the fight at Ferkeh, has been reoccupied; but according to trustworthy information no reinforcements have yet reached Dongola from Omdurman, and, so far as is known at present, none have been despatched. It looks much as if the Khalifa, while fearing to send his Baggara troops to a place so far from his capital as Dongola, dares not display weakness by ordering the present insufficient garrison to evacuate that place, and retire on Omdurman. It will be quite consistent with the tyrant's treacherous character if he abandons his Dongola force to certain defeat and destruction, and then throws all blame for the disaster on the incapacity or disloyalty of the unfortunate Emirs in command.

XVIII

KOSHEH, *Aug.* 16.

THE spell of stormy weather of which I spoke in my last letter did not come to an end until the day before yesterday. For seventeen days the oppressive south wind blew in violent gusts, which swept down on our camp overturning our tents and *tokuls;* often the sun was obscured and we were enveloped in a sand haze, thick as a London fog, but far more disagreeable; and occasionally the thunder-clouds gathered to pour down heavy rain upon us. The health of both Europeans and natives suffered somewhat while this enervating weather lasted, but there was no increase of serious disease. Last Sunday the heaviest sand-storm we have yet experienced rushed down the Nile valley. I happened to be in Amara camp at the time. I had ridden over to that station in the morning to attend one of the frequent gymkhana meetings which our officers get up to keep the troops in good spirits and distract their attention from the cholera. A most successful gymkhana meeting it was; for the British and Egyptian officers and correspondents there were horse races—owners up—including a steeple-

chase with a real water-jump, the water having been brought up from the Nile by fatigue parties; flat races, and a *watchem beechee*, or bare-backed race. An Egyptian officer, by the way, won the three-furlong race. For the Egyptian and Sudanese troops there were camel races, donkey races, foot races, tugs-of-war, and so forth. It was pleasant to see how keenly the men entered into the sport and how thoroughly they enjoyed themselves, displaying the utmost good-humour throughout. Two teams of stalwart Egyptian soldiers, their muscles hardened by work on the railway construction and heavy fatigue duties, engaged in one of the most spirited tugs-of-war I have ever witnessed; I think they would have held their own against an equal number of our own bluejackets. It was an exceedingly hot and oppressive day, and at night, shortly after we had lain down to sleep in the open under the star-lit sky—in this climate no one passes the night in tent or *tokul*—the sand-storm came down upon us. Suddenly the stars went out and it became pitch dark; the burning wind, blowing with the strength of a full gale, drove before it whirling masses of sand which compelled us to roll our blankets round our heads to avoid suffocation. Then followed the thunder and the drenching rain, which covered us with mud. When the wind first struck us it snatched up our clothes which were lying beside us and carried them away with it into the desert. At dawn the bedraggled correspondents were searching all the neighbouring gullies for

missing articles of attire, and soldiers came in from the outposts with our shirts, cummerbunds, and other garments—damp, mud-covered, and torn by rocks and thorns—whose wild career they had intercepted some miles out of camp. Most of our property was thus recovered; but one of our artists still mourns the loss of a new pair of riding-breeches. I see that an English newspaper facetiously alludes to this campaign as a sort of Sunday-school picnic. If the gentleman who sits at home in ease to write this (in no danger from cholera, dysentery, and enteric fever) had passed the last three weeks in Kosheh camp, he would, I imagine, have found it anything but a comfortable picnic. He would soon have wearied of the intense heat, the choking dust-storms alternating with rains of mud, and the plagues of foul flies, not to mention the rats, scorpions, and large poisonous spiders which now swarm in all our huts.

However, personal discomfort is to be expected in a campaign, and is a thing of very small moment. As a matter of fact, all of us at the present moment are in a happy and sanguine frame of mind. We have been waiting here for ten weary weeks, during which we have seen various untoward circumstances combine to delay our advance; but at last, yesterday —a day of jubilation in the camp—several things happened to make us feel confident that our luck had turned, and our spirits were raised by the prospect of once more getting in touch with the enemy at an early date. In the first place, when

we awoke in the morning we found that the storm-bearing southerly wind had been changed for a steady northerly breeze—the prevailing wind of this country—which brings dry and healthy weather with it and will enable the numerous sailing-boats, which have been long lying weatherbound, to proceed to Suarda with their cargoes of supplies. Next we rejoiced to discover that the Nile, which had been rising rapidly for twenty-four hours, had covered all the foreshore, and a telegram from Halfa announced that one of our gunboats, the *Metemmeh*, had passed, without difficulty, the Bab-el-Kebir of the second cataract, the greatest obstacle to the navigation of the Nile, and that the other vessels were following her. Then, later in the day, came information of a reassuring nature from Dongola—a contradiction of a recent report that the cholera had preceded us into the Sudan. Had the cholera, which we had stamped out here, reached Dongola, it would, of course, have greatly hampered the expedition, as we should have had to advance cautiously, taking many precautions on the march, and, despite all our care, another epidemic would in all probability have decimated our army. It was in the evening of this red-letter day that our hearts were cheered by a strange sight. Just before sunset we heard the whistle of the locomotive and perceived, rolling slowly across the desert towards the camp, a train with four trucks bearing what appeared to be four huge square iron cases, painted red, each as big as a two-storey house and towering high above the engine. We knew

these to be the first four sections of the new gunboat that had been constructed in England for the Egyptian Government, and nearly all the British officers and correspondents in camp rode down to welcome them, to the dismay of many of our horses, whose nerves were completely upset when they saw these four blood-red monsters of portentous size advancing upon them.

We shall shortly have seven gunboats and three unarmed steamers on the river. That we shall again be able to surprise the Dervishes as we did at Ferkeh is highly improbable; but if we defeat them at Dongola, or wheresoever else they may decide to make a stand, they are likely to find their retreat as completely cut off as it was in the action of June 7. It is hazardous to prophesy in these matters, but our impression here is that our pursuit of the Khalifa's routed forces will be carried as far as Korti. It should be a pursuit of a terribly effective nature, for our gunboats with their strong armaments and electric search-lights could co-operate with our pursuing column and make it impossible for the fleeing enemy to approach the river by day or night. Our spies report that the Dervishes have been much encouraged by the exaggerated accounts of our cholera epidemic, which the Khalifa sedulously circulates through the country. Professing to believe that Allah is fighting on their behalf, they are displaying unwonted activity in their preparations to oppose us. Not only have they reinforced their post at Kermeh, above the third cataract, but they

have constructed a strong fort at Hafir, on the opposite bank of the river. Small reinforcements have reached Dongola, and Mohammed Wad Bishara still boasts that he will die fighting.

As this young man is in command of the forces that will be opposed to us throughout the Dongola campaign, a short history of his career may be of interest at the present moment. Slatin Pasha, who has a keen insight into human character, a faculty no doubt sharpened during his long captivity, saw a good deal of Wad Bishara in Omdurman. He describes the Governor of Dongola as being a tall, sinewy, beardless, handsome man of thirty-two, a man whose story is worthy of record, as he is a typical Mahdist, and in his own short life has exemplified the whole history of Mahdism—its early honest purpose and fanaticism, its gradual decay, its present degradation. The following is the story as told me by Slatin Pasha:—

Wad Bishara is of the same tribe as the Khalifa —the Taaisha section of the great Baggara tribe— but he is no relation of Abdullahi. Bishara's father was a *fakir* of great piety, who taught the Koran to children in a small school. Bishara received his education in this school, but he was a high-spirited lad who did not love his book, and though he learnt to read in a halting fashion he never acquired the art of writing, and his private secretary now conducts all his correspondence. Bishara's father and the Khalifa's father had been old friends, so when Bishara's father joined the Khalifa at El Obeid he

was warmly welcomed by the latter, and the young Bishara, who was then in his teens, was at once attached to the person of Osman Wad Adam, the Khalifa's first cousin, as a *Mulazem*, or one of his bodyguard. Nine years ago Osman Wad Adam, though but two years older than Bishara, was appointed Emir-in-chief of Darfur and Kordofan, and was thus in command of the whole army of the west. Recognizing the courage and military talent of his *protégé* he placed Bishara in command of a *rub* (the equivalent to our brigade, each Dervish army being divided into four or more *rubs*), and afterwards made him his second in command of the army of the west. At this time these two young men were much attached to each other and resembled each other in character and habits. They were brave fanatics, enthusiastic, pure in their lives, their one object in this world being to fight valiantly for their faith against the unbelievers. In Slatin Pasha's book Osman Wad Adam is thus described :—"A courageous leader who paid careful attention to the wants of his men, and had done much to increase the strength and number of the Mahdist forces ; he invariably sent to the Khalifa the fair share of the booty, and disinterestedly divided the remainder amongst his people, keeping only for himself what sufficed for his immediate wants. He was a magnificent rider, was most popular with every one, and avoided leading an effeminate and enervating existence ; for long after his death he was looked upon as a fine example of a bold and courageous Arab."

This description would apply equally well to the Wad Bishara of those days—days of hard and simple living and high aspirations—to which he now must occasionally look back with regret when surfeited with the luxuries and vices of which he has recently become the slave. Even in those days young Bishara, with all his religious zeal and Quixotism, appears to have had the makings of a shrewd man of the world, and to have known how best to further his own interests. It is now eight years since he and his chief, Osman Wad Adam, made a journey from Darfur to visit the Khalifa at Omdurman. While in the capital he ostentatiously distributed money among the people, and acquired the reputation of being a very charitable and truly religious person. Slatin Pasha, then a captive, met him, and, in the course of conversation, alluded to the young man's extraordinary popularity. To this Bishara, smiling, replied in the words of an Arab proverb. "The wise," he said, "buy men when they are cheap, not when they are dear," signifying that a little liberality displayed when all was going well with one and when there was apparently nothing to be gained by it was accepted by the people as evidence of a kind heart, and produced a far greater effect than a more lavish expenditure in a season of danger and difficulty, when the reason for such generosity was patent to all.

After a short stay in Omdurman, Bishara returned to Darfur with Osman Wad Adam, and was despatched by his chief to put down the serious rebel-

lion of Abu Gemmaiza. Attacked by overwhelming numbers, his force of *Mulazemin* was defeated with great loss, but this misfortune reflected no disgrace on the gallant young leader, and he took part in the subsequent operations which ended in the annihilation of the rebel army. In 1890 Osman Wad Adam died, a victim to a severe epidemic of typhoid fever which had broken out among his troops, and Bishara was left for a short time in sole command of the army of the west. But the Khalifa was unwilling to entrust so important a post to any but a relation of his own, and he accordingly sent his first cousin, Mahmud Wad Ahmed, to supersede Bishara. This was a young man of very different character to his predecessor. Mahmud Wad Ahmed was a true representative of the decadence of Mahdism. Being of an indolent and luxurious disposition, he readily acquired all the vices which had become fashionable in the Khalifa's household and among the aristocracy in Omdurman. He spent the greater part of his time with his concubines and singing girls; his one object in life was to acquire wealth by extortion in order to gratify his inordinate taste for debauchery; he defrauded his soldiers of their pay, altogether neglected their comfort, and took no interest either in the welfare of his army or in the execution of his duties as Governor of a great province—a province, by the way, which he is misgoverning at the present moment. It was to be foreseen that he and Bishara would not agree. The latter, still pure amid the ever-increasing corruption that surrounded him, had

the courage openly to rebuke his chief for his ill-treatment of the soldiers. This brought about a rupture between them, and the debauched Mahmud, bitterly incensed against his puritanical subordinate, degraded him from his position as second in command of the army of the west and left him in command of a single *rub*. Towards the close of 1890 the troops under Mahmud rose in open mutiny; it was their intention to kill their incapable chief and all the Emirs under him with the exception of Bishara, who was regarded by all as being the soldiers' friend. The mutiny was suppressed, and a great number of the men were put to death; but the incident intensified Mahmud's hatred of Bishara, so that, shortly afterwards, when Mahmud and Bishara went to Omdurman, the latter implored the Khalifa to allow him to stay in the capital, as he was unwilling to serve any longer under the Governor of Darfur. The Khalifa acceded to this request, and gave Bishara the command of a *rub* of his own *Mulazemin*—a bodyguard of several thousand picked men who are quartered within a great wall which surrounds the houses of the Khalifa and his family. The Khalifa's son, Osman, was Emir-in-chief of the bodyguard; like Bishara's former chief, he was a very dissipated youth, but he appears to have taken a liking to the austere Bishara and made him his second in command.

Bishara was now living in the midst of the gross immorality which has gradually destroyed the spirit of Mahdism. Ignoring the Mahdist tenets of self-

abnegation and purity, the Khalifa himself set an example of unbridled profligacy, which was followed by all who could afford to do so. Probably at first the religious and ascetic Bishara was disgusted with his surroundings; but it is certain that he gradually lost sight of his high ideals, that his whole moral nature at last became corrupted, and that he now greedily indulges in the vices from which he kept aloof throughout his early manhood. The Oriental is a man of extremes. It is not unusual to see the man who was the honest fanatic, the earnest reformer, the loather of all vice, become within a few years the selfish hypocrite, the voluptuary sunk in sloth, with no will for action left, his intellect weakened by excesses, displaying no energy save in fitful outbreaks of cruelty and in savage orgies. Such was the Mahdi's history. Bishara may not have reached these depths yet, but refugees state that his character has greatly degenerated within the last few years, and that he no longer commands the respect and love of his troops. It is now more than a year ago that he was sent to Dongola in place of Yunes as Emir-in-chief of that province. He lives a life of degrading luxury in his large house in the city of Dongola, surrounded by his dancing girls and musicians. His letters to Hamuda and other Dervish leaders, which were found at Ferkeh, have already appeared in *The Times*. One would gather from them that Bishara is a man of noble character and sincere piety, as well as an able general. But it must be remembered that of all hypocrisies the

most complete is that of the latter-day Mahdist who has fallen away from the observance of his religious duties, so that the sanctimonious epistles of the Dervishes must not be taken too seriously. Whether we shall find Wad Bishara effeminate, shorn of his strength, and more inclined to take to flight with his dancing girls than to give us a desperate battle, or whether, when at bay, he will prove himself to be the brave warrior and able leader he was but a few years since, and offer a determined resistance, is a problem that will be solved very soon; for our preparations will be complete in about a week, and our match on Dongola, when it does commence, will be a rapid one.

XIX

KOSHEH, *August* 24.

Now that the cholera has been stamped out in all the camps of the expeditionary force, and that the further progress south of the epidemic has been averted, an account of the methods that have been employed to bring about this desirable state of things may be of some interest. To us, who are on the spot, and have been admiring observers of all that has been done, the criticisms of these methods which have recently appeared in some English papers seem to be very unfair; and due credit is not given to our little band of British and Egyptian medical officers, who have, with great ability, energy, and pluck, combated and signally defeated the most deadly of our foes. These critics, ignoring the circumstances in which we are placed, suggest that things would have been better managed had this been a British expedition, and that lives have been unnecessarily lost because what they term the Indian method of dealing with cholera was not adopted on this occasion. They maintain that the Sirdar, in order to leave the cholera behind him as soon as possible, should have promptly moved his

troops from the infected districts, and should have kept them marching south so long as there was a single case in his camp. This plan, of course, has its advantages; but it is obvious that, while thus attempting to escape from an epidemic, a General incurs a great risk of carrying it with him, to spread it through districts not yet infected; for adequate precautions cannot be taken while troops are on the march, and under those conditions it is no easy matter to shake off cholera. Moreover, to have marched the force up the Nile valley on the outbreak of cholera would have been an extremely hazardous experiment, as our transport arrangements were at that time incomplete. An entirely different plan was wisely adopted, a plan which I think can be shown not only to have been the one most practicable from the military point of view, but also the one best calculated to stamp out the epidemic promptly and reduce the number of cases to a minimum.

Surgeon-Lieutenant-Colonel Gallwey, the principal medical officer of the Egyptian army, is one whose opinion on the subject cannot but carry great weight; for what medical officer has had a wider experience of cholera than he? He was at work in Egypt throughout the great epidemics of 1883, when within three months there were 65,000 deaths. He has been fighting with the present epidemic since its inception—a tough fight, as this is the most deadly form of cholera known, the "dry cholera," fatal in nearly every case, though often unaccom-

panied by the usual severe pain and cramps in the limbs. It has destroyed 15,000 people since last October according to the official reports, but there must have been several thousands of unreported cases. When the cholera, creeping up the river, reached the frontier, Gallwey Bey was summoned to crush this insidious enemy, and I think he has satisfied every one here that his plan of attack is most effective. He holds that, whatever may be the best thing to do in other countries, on the Nile valley, when cholera has found its way into a military station, the safer policy is not to retreat before it, but to make a bold stand and fight it out with the epidemic on the spot. He arrived at Kosheh three days after the cholera had broken out in our camp, and, while explaining to the Sirdar the tactics he intended to pursue, said :—"This is a military camp, so we ought to be ashamed of ourselves if we cannot stamp out the cholera within ten days." As a matter of fact, the last case occurred nine days later.

Cholera invariably follows the lines of human communication, and in all countries it has been found that where there is considerable river traffic, there the cholera travels with the greatest facility and fastens upon more centres of diffusion ; this is more especially the case in an Oriental country, where it is generally impossible to prevent the natives from defiling the river while performing the ablutions prescribed by their religion. Experience shows that in the vast majority of cases cholera is caught by drinking infected water; this is practically

—so far as this country is concerned at any rate—the only way in which it is communicated. It therefore follows that the epidemic can be quickly stamped out in any place where effective measures can be taken to keep human beings away from the polluted water. Impossible though it may be to do this when dealing with the ignorant and prejudiced population of an Eastern town, it is not difficult to enforce the necessary precautions in a military camp, more especially if it be in Nubia, with the mighty flood of the Nile on one side affording the only water supply, and the waterless desert extending on the other side. When the cholera broke out in our camps the men were kept off the river, an unpolluted water supply was secured, and each case was carefully isolated. As Gallwey Bey pointed out, this could not be done thoroughly when men were on the march; some would find their way to the river to infect it and spread the disease among those who followed. "Never march in this country with cholera," he urged. "Stay where you are until you have stamped it out, then march as soon as you like." The maximum period of incubation for this form of cholera appears to be six days. In every case that was investigated the drinking water had been drawn from stagnant pools and backwaters of the river in which infected men had bathed or had washed their clothes; and in every camp where cholera broke out the disease ceased to spread as soon as access to the contaminated stream was cut off.

The history of the progress of the epidemic from

Assuan southwards is highly instructive and quite bears out Gallwey Bey's contention. The cholera was first introduced into Assuan by a Berberi, who left Cairo on June 5, contracted the disease while on the journey up the Nile, and developed the symptoms on June 12. From the 8th to the 12th, when he was in a condition to disseminate the germs of cholera broadcast, he lay on one of Messrs. Cook and Co.'s barges, which was moored in a stagnant bight of the river in front of Assuan, so that the barge was soon surrounded by floating poison. On June 13 four men of a gang of civil convicts who had been employed in unloading the barge, and who had drunk freely of the water beneath it, were seized with cholera. Gallwey Bey promptly isolated the 180 convicts who composed this gang in the civil prison, which was in a very sanitary condition, disinfected the men, and boiled their kits. From the 13th to the 18th there were four or five fresh cases a day among these convicts. There were no cases after the 18th—a significant fact; in exactly six days —the period of incubation—the original infection had worked itself out, only those, apparently, who had absorbed the germs while drinking the water round the barge contracted cholera.

The whole epidemic in and south of Assuan can be directly traced to this wretched Berberi, who, by the way, was one of the very few who recovered. On the night of June 12 the men of the 5th battalion, disembarking from the steamer that had brought them up the river, had to cross the deck of this same

fatal barge; some, of course, drank the water before landing. Gallwey Bey, on being informed of this, telegraphed to Wady Halfa, to which station the battalion was proceeding, giving instructions that the troops should be carefully inspected on their arrival, as they had passed through an infected spot. The cholera, however, broke out among them before they reached Wady Halfa, for on the 14th the first case occurred at Korosko. The battalion was at once encamped in the desert on the west bank of the Nile, but at some distance from the river, so that the men could be easily prevented from contaminating it. Again, in this instance the last case occurred exactly six days after the original infection at Assuan; only those who had drunk the water beneath the barge were attacked by the cholera. Had the men been allowed access to the Nile while in this camp, they would have poisoned each other in succession, and the epidemic would have continued for an indefinite time.

But the men of the 5th battalion had no doubt polluted the usual drinking-places on the river while marching from Assuan; for cholera now broke out in the 1st battalion, which had marched close on their heels. This battalion also was at once placed in the desert, to remain there until the infection had worked itself out. The first case occurred on June 23, the last case on the 29th; so here again, be it noted, we have the six days' incubation, and a proof that adequate precautions against fresh infection had been taken while the men were in their desert camp.

At Wady Halfa the epidemic was very severe, and was more difficult to cope with than at the other stations, for at this place there is a large civilian population, of dirty habits, which cannot be kept fully under control; while the women's lines of the Sudanese regiments became centres of infection, and numbers of these poor widows died. At Halfa, therefore, to stamp out the epidemic was no easy task. Isolated cases occurred up to within the last few days, and others may still occur. But the preparations for the expedition had to be carried on at all costs. Troops and transport trains had perforce to pass through the infected districts; a strict quarantine was out of the question, and Halfa threatened to become a serious source of danger to the camps further south—an accumulator, so to speak, of cholera poison and a distributor of it far and wide.

But, despite these great difficulties, the strenuous efforts of our medical officers were attended with success even in Halfa, while the further progress south of the epidemic may be said to have been arrested at Kosheh; for but few cases have occurred beyond this camp. Our first case was on July 15, while we were encamped on the river bank. The infection, as usual, came from the water. That night a *ryce* was attacked by cholera and died in his boat, which lay close to the shore. Several cases followed, all of which were among the men who had drawn their drinking water from that part of the river. Other boatmen, coming from the north, brought further infection with them, and it was not

until July 25 that our last cases occurred. It was on that day that a gloom was cast over the camp by the death of Captain Fenwick and Surgeon-Captain Trask; both had unwittingly drunk unboiled water which had been drawn from the river just below a boat in which a Berberi lay dying of cholera.

The sanitary precautions that had been enforced in our camps before the cholera broke out answered their purpose very well at that time; but the appearance of cholera rendered a much more rigid system necessary. Thus our original rule, to the effect that men could bathe and wash their clothes below a certain point on the river, while all drinking water was to be drawn above that point, was no safeguard against cholera, more especially as the soldiers bathe in crowds and make a practice of drinking while they are in the water. Gallwey Bey arrived at Kosheh on July 17. His first step was to move the whole camp 2000 yards back from the river to high desert ground, spreading the camp over as much space as military exigencies would permit. The river bank was constantly patrolled to prevent the men from bathing, washing clothes, or drinking in it. They were not even allowed to approach it save when they were sent down in parties to draw water for the camp at the appointed places, which were above all the pools that had been infected and at points where the water ran fast under the bank. A severe flogging was the punishment for any infringement of the regulations. In the camp itself everything was done to isolate the

cases as they occurred. Disinfection was of course carried out in a thorough manner, and the men who were engaged on burial parties incurred no risk, as the blankets in which the corpses were rolled were soaked with a very powerful disinfectant.

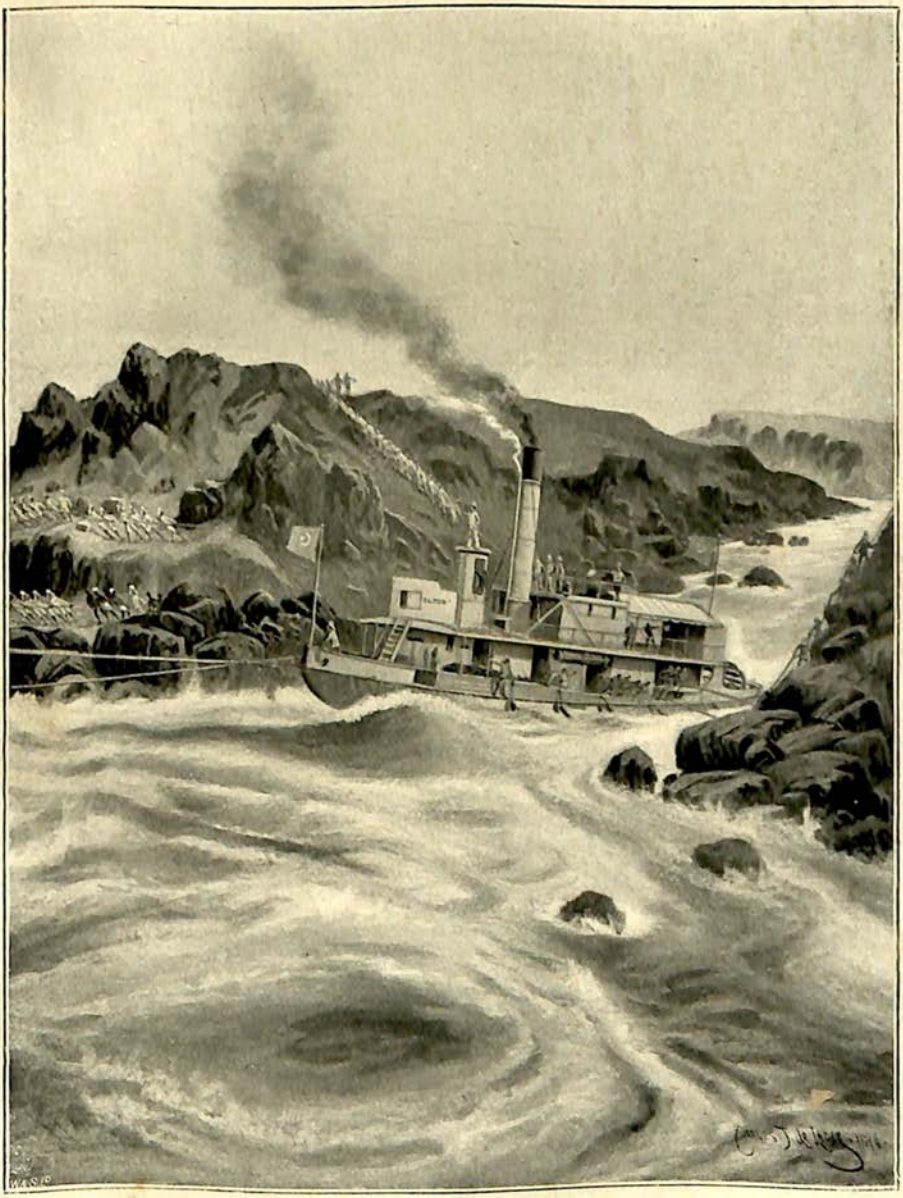
By these methods the cholera, whenever it appeared in a military camp, was promptly stamped out, and I fail to see on what grounds critics, writing in England, have come to the conclusion that this result could have been better attained in some other way. But, though men may hold different views as to the method of dealing with cholera, I am sure that on one point all would be agreed, had they been here through this epidemic. Hunter Bey and his small staff of young English army surgeons that were attached to this expedition—Spong, Whiston, Hill-Smith, Penton, and poor Trask—but six of them in all to deal with a serious cholera epidemic that had spread through a force of 15,000 men, though heavily overworked throughout all that anxious time, displayed the highest qualities, and proved themselves to be men of whom their country may well be proud. The Egyptian medical officers also showed that they were of the right stuff, and on all sides are spoken of in terms of high praise.

XX

KOSHEH, *Aug.* 31.

WHEN I wrote two weeks ago it seemed to all of us here that the ill luck which had for some time dogged the expedition had wearied of persecuting us, and that the stubborn perseverance of those who are conducting this difficult enterprise was to be rewarded at last. The shifting of the wind to the north, the disappearance of cholera, the safe passage of the second cataract by the steamers, spread a feeling of sanguine expectation throughout the camp. After all this weary waiting the advance seemed near; so we began to pack up our belongings and otherwise make ready for it. On going to the club one noticed that all the men were more cheery than they had been for some time; not that these young frontier officers are subject to depression in any circumstances, but the prospect of an early encounter with the enemy, of whom we have seen so little, naturally raised high spirits higher still. What we always speak of now as the club is the river bank at the terminus of the railway, along which the steamers lie moored. This is the regular rendezvous of the British officers and correspondents. Every

evening we ride down here and chat as we watch the progress of the manifold preparations around us. Two months since I rode out from Ferkeh and found the ruins of the old British fort at Kosheh standing in the midst of a silent wilderness; not a human being was in sight. In strange contrast to that utter desolation is the busy scene of to-day, with its bustle and din. There is a perpetual sound of riveting and hammering. The trains occasionally come thundering in with supplies, bits of machinery, and the armament of the new gunboat. Here on the open sands blacksmiths are at work over their forges; gangs of soldiers are engaged in making bricks (sun-dried) for the walls of the new railway station, which is now nearly complete, and is quite an imposing-looking building; soldiers, too, lay the bricks, and are, indeed, set to perform any sort of work that has to be done, both Egyptians and blacks proving themselves to be veritable Jacks of all trades. It was interesting to watch the putting together of the sections of the new gunboat, her launching, and then her gradual approach to the semblance of a man-of-war, as, under the energetic superintendence of Commander Colville, the heavy bits of machinery, the turrets, and the armament were lifted by the great shears and placed in position on board. Our young Engineer officers and the score or so of men of the Royal Engineers under Lieutenant Elkington did their work splendidly. The most exciting day at the club was that on which the seven steamers, having safely passed the second cataract, steamed



HAULING A GUN-BOAT UP THE SECOND CATARACT.

up the river in a procession and moored in front of the railway station. We saw the columns of black smoke when the boats were yet far off; nearly all the Englishmen in camp went down to the slip to meet them, and the troops raised cheers as they came up. The Sirdar himself, the most energetic of commanders, who loves to inspect personally every detail of the preparations, visits the river bank both morning and evening to superintend the work.

At last, all was apparently ready for the general advance, and the forward movement of some detachments of troops convinced us that we should not have to wait much longer. When we heard that the 2nd Brigade under Major Macdonald had marched from Suarda to Absarat, thirty-seven miles south of Kosheh as the crow flies, and that the 1st Brigade was under orders to reinforce it, we felt that we were really "Well on our way to Dongola," to use the words of the expedition song (a parody of Kipling's "Mandalay"), which is sung here nightly with boisterous choruses that must startle the desert hyenas. But we were doomed to disappointment; our persistent bad luck had not yet left us. The wind veered to the south, and on August 25 a terrific storm, far more violent than any we have yet experienced here, violent though some of those have been, swept along our whole line of communication, from Suarda to Halfa, destroying the work of many weeks. The day had been oppressively hot in Kosheh, and ominous

"sand devils" whirled through the camp, the forerunners of the *haboub*. At about four in the afternoon we saw a huge black mass, evidently a sandstorm of great magnitude, rise from the horizon and advance rapidly upon us, travelling against the wind, as thunderstorms do at home. In a few minutes it was upon us, and the wind, suddenly backing, struck us with the force of a strong gale, a gale which appeared to be composed more largely of sand than of air. The dense stinging streams of sand drove over us. No one could face the storm and breathe; it was impossible to see a yard in front of one; it became dark as on a starless night. We crouched on the lee side of our *tokuls* until they were blown down; then there was nothing to be done but to remain where we were, in the open desert, with our backs to the wind and our heads enveloped in blankets so as partly to filter the air of sand and render it capable of being breathed. Next came torrents of rain and loud thunder, accompanied by the most vivid lightning. The lightning, however, as a rule, did not reveal even our immediate surroundings, but diffused a brilliant light through the sand-charged air, which appeared as a semi-opaque luminous mist. It was, indeed, an appalling spectacle, and the din was fearful, a strange discord of thunder, shrieking wind, pattering rain, and clattering of empty paraffin tins, cases, and barrels, that were driving before the gale over the stony ground. While the storm was at its height no man could move from one part of the camp to another,

and each had to remain where he was until that suffocating cloud of dust had swept by.

As the telegraph had broken down, and the railway had been damaged in several places, our communication with the north was cut off, and it was not until the night of August 27 that we ascertained the full extent of the mischief wrought by this storm. Then a camelman brought in a letter containing the news, and we learnt to our dismay that twelve miles of the railway near Sarras had been washed away, and that it would probably take a fortnight to repair the damage. This meant another long delay before we could advance, and who could say that another storm would not repeat the work of destruction as soon as the repairs had been effected; for persistent ill luck pursued the expedition. It was enough to dishearten a General, for it was more than ordinary ill luck; such weather as we have recently experienced is absolutely unprecedented in this country. The section of the line that was washed away formed part of the old railway constructed in 1874; our engineers found the embankment in excellent condition; it had stood firm, unaffected by such light rains as may have fallen in the course of the last twenty-two years, until, at the most inopportune moment possible, it was laid level with the desert by the deluge of the 25th. The rushing waters, we learn, washed rails and sleepers seventy yards from the line; a torrent of water 100 yards wide and six feet deep suddenly swept away the whole railway camp near Sarras,

carrying away with it two men who were with difficulty saved. On receiving the report of what had happened the ever-energetic Sirdar at once set out, though it was after midnight, for the scene of the disaster, and his presence there will probably expedite the completion of the repairs by some days, for no one knows better than he how to get the most work out of men within a given time. The foul weather has not yet come to an end. A dust-storm is raging as I with difficulty write this; the sand is whirling about even inside my *tokul*—which will probably be blown down in the course of the day—and I can scarcely distinguish its opposite wall. The news has also just arrived that another storm yesterday washed away a portion of the line near Akasheh.

The Sirdar has proved himself to be pre-eminently the right man to conduct such an enterprise as this to a successful conclusion in the face of great difficulties. In some respects his must be a disheartening and a thankless task. He has received his instructions to carry a large design into execution with very limited means at his disposal. Some Generals would have been reluctant to accept such a responsibility unless they were more liberally provided with the sinews of war. The extravagant expenditure of the last campaign, when immense sums were thrown away in this country, will not be repeated on this occasion. The Government that ordered the advance on Dongola is apparently unwilling to contribute towards the expenses, so that

the campaign has perforce to be conducted "on the cheap." In every department the strictest economy has to be observed. Notwithstanding this parsimony the desired object will be attained, but it will be at the cost of much suffering among the troops, loss of life, and possibly a good deal of disaffection. Money has been saved by overworking the soldiers throughout all the hot season on the railway construction, the transport, and other fatiguing service, and the death-rate and sick list have undoubtedly been higher in consequence. The men thus employed of course receive no extra pay, whereas in 1884 we went to the other extreme, and the British Government paid each Egyptian soldier engaged on the railway construction a shilling a day in addition to his ordinary pay. The Sirdar never spares himself, and sets an example of untiring energy. He feels that he is compelled by the economical restrictions imposed upon him to get the utmost amount of work possible out of his officers and men. His officers certainly need no driving; they overwork themselves with a cheery spirit, realizing that, in the present circumstances, it is only by dint of arduous toil on the part of all that the expedition can be successfully carried through. But an economical Government should bear in mind that it is bad policy and more expensive in the end to work the willing horse to death. The Egyptian army has been converted by British officers into a splendid fighting machine; but discontent will spring up, even in the ranks of the patient fellahin soldiery, if

it becomes the custom to condemn the men to such excessive hard labour as they have been put to this year.

In the organization of this expedition every piastre had to be considered, every expenditure had to be cut down. Six British medical officers, even when ably assisted by their native colleagues, are surely insufficient for a force of 18,000 men, campaigning in a trying climate, with cholera and dysentery thinning the ranks. Of British officers we certainly did start with a goodly number; but now 30 per cent. have succumbed to the climate (five officers having died, the others having left the country invalided), and in some battalions we have now but two British officers left. The French Anglophobe papers published at Cairo are, of course, exaggerating our misfortunes, and severely criticize—in a very unfair spirit—the Sirdar's conduct of this expedition. Sir Herbert Kitchener has not at his disposal the millions of pounds that were squandered during the last campaign. If some things might have been done better—that is, so far as provision for the comfort and health of the troops is concerned—for in no other respect would it be easy for any one to find fault—not with the Sirdar chiefly must lie the blame, but with the Government which (so we understand out here) grudges the money to meet the expenses of an expedition ordered by itself. The expedition will not prove to be the *fiasco* predicted by the Anglophobes in Cairo, for we have the right men here

to carry it safely through; and, later on, no doubt, statesmen will be able to congratulate themselves on the fact that no campaign of like magnitude and importance ever cost so ridiculously small a sum; but this is not a matter of which one should be very proud.

Whether the Dervish leaders are kept well informed as to our preparations and movements is uncertain. If they know that the "enemies of God" will shortly advance on Dongola with a force of 15,000 men, supported by seven gunboats and bringing thirty-six guns with them, they must realize the hopelessness of their attempting to hold that place against us. But Wad el Bishara still boasts of the determined resistance he intends to make, and the Khalifa has recently sent to him small reinforcements from Omdurman. On the other hand, our own Intelligence Department has a full knowledge of everything that is doing in the enemy's camp. The information communicated by refugees generally receives corroboration from independent sources, and the Dervish leaders are unable to keep any of their dispositions secret from the "enemies of God." For example, a valuable and detailed description of the defences of Dongola was brought in here the other day by Mubarak, the sheikh of Suarda, who, with several other village sheiks, had been carried off by the Dervishes when they retreated before our troops after the battle of Ferkeh. Suspected of being friendly to the "enemies of God," he was put into chains in

Dongola; but when news came up that his house had been pulled down by the Khedive's troops (several houses had to be gutted when we occupied Suarda, so as to put the village in a defensible condition), he pointed out that this destruction of his property by the enemy afforded a conclusive proof that he was not regarded as a friend by the latter. Wad el Bishara, it appears, was taken in by this specious argument, and ordered him to be released. Then the wily Mubarak offered to give a signal proof of his loyalty to the Khalifa by returning to the neighbourhood of Suarda to spy out our movements and ascertain our plans. The trusting Wad el Bishara approved of so much zeal, and sent him off with four Dervishes to carry out this design. His method of escaping from these companions was ingenious. On approaching an outlying hamlet of the Suarda district at night he walked at some distance in front of the four men, having lulled their suspicions with a plausible pretext; then, meeting a small boy who recognized him, he instructed him to wake up several of the villagers, and to bid them shout with a loud voice, "We have captured Mubarak!" The ruse effected its object; the Dervishes at once took to flight, believing that the sheikh had been made a prisoner by Government troops; and Mubarak was free to proceed to his old home, report himself to the Intelligence Department, whose secret agent he has been for some time, and communicate all the information he had gathered while at Dongola.

Another of our agents has recently come in from Omdurman itself with what I understand is a most valuable report. He had been despatched to Dongola by the Intelligence Department on May 6. He was there arrested, brought before Wad el Bishara, and accused of being a Government spy. His explanation to the effect that his sole object in coming to Dongola was to see some of his relations was not credited, and he was sent in chains to Omdurman. The Khalifa is a cunning scoundrel, but, as he is extremely ignorant, his cunning often takes a puerile form. He sent for this prisoner and said to him, "I will give you your liberty, and you can go back to your country if you will do one thing for me. Here is a letter, take it to the enemy's camp, and deliver it yourself into the hands of Slatin; deliver it as if you were endeavouring to do so secretly, but at the same time make certain that other men of the enemy's leaders observe what you are doing." It was a silly trick. The Khalifa was foolish enough to imagine that this letter, if it fell into the hands of our military authorities, would satisfy them that Slatin Pasha, his whilom captive, whom he hates with an intense hatred, is a Mahdist at heart and a traitor to the Egyptian Government. He no doubt at present flatters himself that Slatin has either been put to death, or is on his way down to Cairo in chains. Slatin Pasha, shortly after his escape from Omdurman, wrote a letter to the Khalifa in which he thanked Abdullahi for all the kindness he had shown him (?), but pointed out that

as leave to return to Europe for the purpose of visiting his relations had always been refused to him, he had felt compelled to leave Omdurman without the Khalifa's permission and without consulting any one; but he hoped to renew his acquaintance with his kind master at a later date. Slatin's object in writing this letter was to allay the wrath of the tyrant, whose character he so thoroughly understood, and to prevent him from ill-treating the servants the fugitive had left behind him in Omdurman, who might be suspected of being his accomplices. It was in reply to this that the Khalifa sent the above-mentioned letter to Slatin Pasha, little suspecting that he was employing one of our own spies as his messenger. A week ago the letter was duly brought here by this man, who had a twinkle in his eye as he delivered it to Slatin Pasha in the presence of "others of the enemy's leaders," as had been enjoined by the Khalifa. The following is a literal translation:—

"In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. Praise be unto God, the generous Governor, and prayers be unto our Lord Mahomet and his family. With salutations. From the servant of God, the Khalifa of the Mahdi (peace be upon him), Khalifa Abdullahi, the Khalifate es Sadik to Abd el Kader Slatin. After salutations, I write this to inform you that I have received the letter you sent me, which is written in your own handwriting, and in which you state that you still adhere to the Islam faith, that you do not betray the

religion and are not unfaithful to the bread and salt; which letter I keep with me. Now that you are with the infidels you will employ the necessary stratagems which will enable us to take them at a disadvantage. The Moslem armies are advancing against them at the present time. All that I need tell you now is that you must take the necessary steps in profound secrecy."

KOSHEH CAMP, *Sept.* 1.

FOR some days we have known here that the 1st and 2nd Brigades, while marching on Absarat, endured great fatigue and suffering, and that some lives were lost; but it is only this afternoon, while I am concluding this letter, that I have received a detailed and what I believe to be a trustworthy account of what occurred. The disaster was far more serious than I at first imagined. It will be remembered that the 2nd Brigade which had been stationed at Suarda since the battle of Ferkeh, occupied Sadin Fanti a week ago. The Sirdar's orders were that the brigade, instead of following the river, which here makes a bend, was to march from Suarda directly across the desert to its destination, thirty-one miles distant. The day was intensely hot, the men were in heavy marching order, and were unable to obtain any water save that which they carried in their bottles, as it appears that few, if any, camels laden with water skins accompanied the column. The men consequently suffered

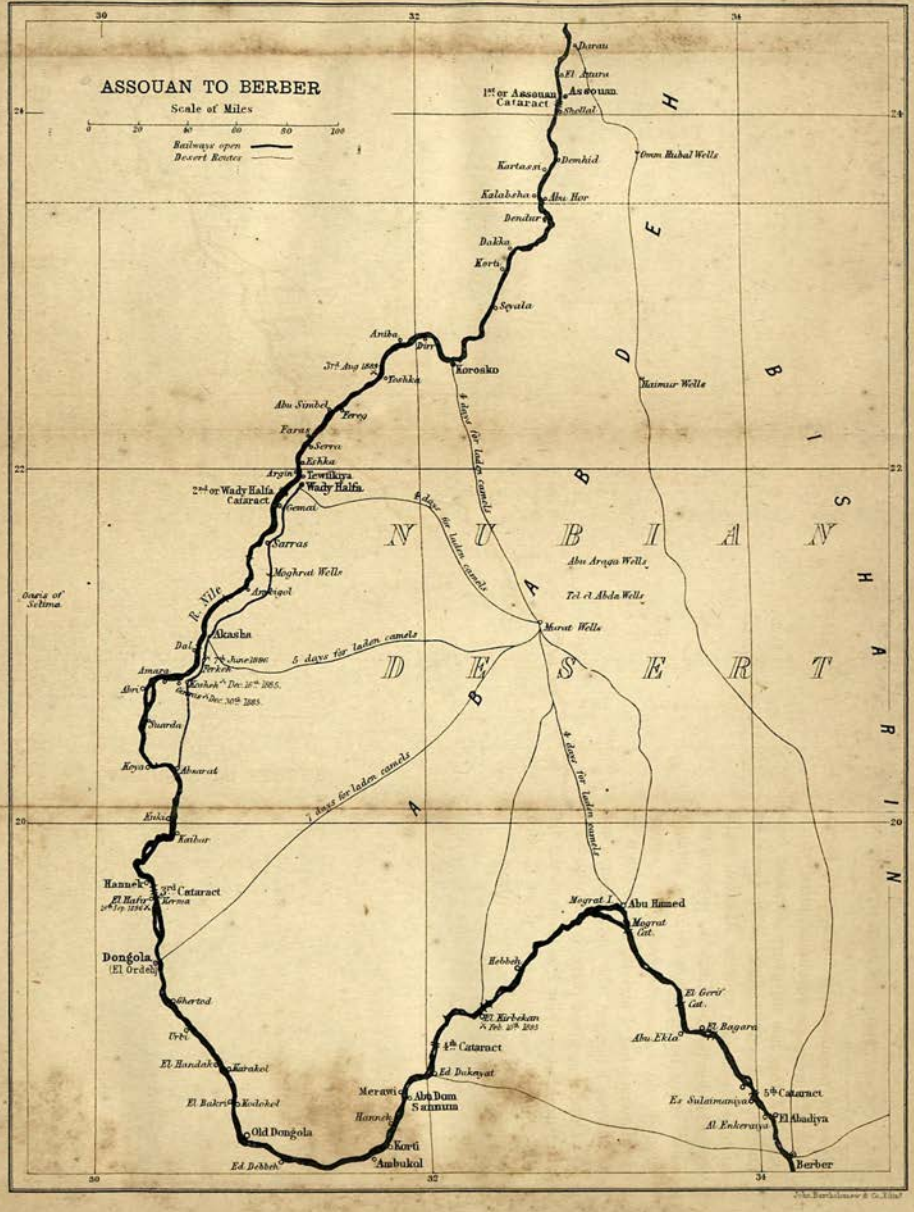
greatly from thirst; there were twenty-nine cases of sunstroke, two of which proved immediately fatal. A great number fell out, and the poor fellows struggled into camp in the most exhausted condition, many being still unfit for active service.

This was bad enough, but still worse were the experiences of the 1st Brigade. This brigade was stationed at Kosheh, and in this case also orders were that the men should not follow the river bank but strike in a straight line across the river to Sadin Fanti, and thence proceed to Absarat, a distance in all of thirty-seven miles, which had to be accomplished within the twenty-four hours—a trying march for men of whom many were just out of hospital, and of whom each man carried his rifle, his kit, two days' rations, and 100 rounds of Martini-Henry ammunition. A few days before the departure of the troops camels were sent laden with water tanks, and two watering-places were established on the road for the use of the men. A storm prevented the brigade from leaving Kosheh on the appointed day (August 26), but it was ordered to set out on the afternoon of the 27th, though another storm was threatening. Before the men reached the first watering-place the dreaded sand-storm swept down upon them; it was fortunately not nearly so violent as many that we have experienced, or the consequences would have been appalling. As it was, nearly 300 men fell out at this early stage of the march, and on the following morning I saw them straggling back into their old camp at Kosheh.

Most of them were men of the ill-fated 10th Sudanese battalion which has already lost in the course of this campaign 120 men killed and wounded, fifty having died of cholera. In all nine men died on this terrible march, and by the time the column reached Sadin Fanti another 1700 men had fallen out; of one battalion only sixty men marched in out of the 700. The camel corps, all the mules, and the officers' chargers were at once sent out to bring in the exhausted and dying men. Even the stronger men, who did not fall out, were completely worn out on their arrival; eighty men are still in hospital. If economy has so cut down our means of transport that camels cannot be spared to carry a reserve of drinking water for the men when on a desert march, as appears to have been the case when the 2nd Brigade was moved, why, one naturally wonders, were not the men marched along the Nile bank, even though the distance be a little greater? The order was given by the Sirdar; it had to be obeyed; but the *morale* of the finest troops is liable to suffer if the men are treated with what they consider to be unnecessary cruelty.

I will conclude this letter by making what I consider to be a necessary explanation. The newspaper correspondents who accompany this expedition are practically chained to head-quarters, and, moreover, it is made extremely difficult for them to acquire from any sources that kind of information which is freely communicated to them on most campaigns. I myself have frequently applied to the

Sirdar for permission to accompany forward movements of the troops, reconnaissances, patrols, and so forth, but this has on every occasion been refused. Though Colonel Hunter, with two-thirds of the infantry division, is now at Absarat, correspondents are forbidden by the Sirdar to proceed to that place. There may be excellent reasons, though they are beyond my comprehension, for these unusual restrictions; but I feel bound to point out that if, as may well happen, the only serious collision with the Dervishes takes place before the correspondents are permitted to join the force at the front, and if, consequently, we cannot be there to chronicle what occurs, the blame will not lie with us.


ASSOUAN TO BERBER
Scale of Miles
0 20 40 60 80 100
Railways open
Desert Routes
30
32
34
24
22
20
Daraw
El Azuru
1st or Assouan Cataract
Assouan
Shellal
Kartassi
Domhid
Oasis of Selima
Kalabsha
Abu Hor
Dendur
Dakka
Korti
Seyala
Amka
Dirr
Korosko
3rd Aug 1885
Dakka
Abu Simbel
Tereg
Faras
Serra
Ekkka
Argin
Tewfikiya
2nd or Wady Halfa Cataract
Wady Halfa
Gemai
Sarras
Moghrat Wells
Amygol
R. Nile
Alcasha
Dal
2nd June 1886
Amara
Abri
Kosheh 16th Dec 1885.
Kosheh 30th Dec 1885.
Shurda
Keyas
Absarat
Enkid
Kaibar
Hannek
3rd Cataract
El Hafir
Kerma
Dongola
(El Ordeb)
Sherted
Urbi
El Handakeh
Karakol
El Bakri
Kodekel
Old Dongola
Ed Debbeh
Merawi
Abu Dom
Samnum
Hannek
Korti
Ambukol
4th Cataract
Ed Dokeyat
Kirbekan
Feb 20th 1885
Hebbeh
Mograt I.
Abu Hamed
Mograt Cat.
El Gerif
Cat.
El Bagara
Abu Ekla
5th Cataract
Ez Zuteimaniya
El Abadiya
Al Enkeriya
Berber
Murat Wells
Abu Aragga Wells
Tel el Abda Wells
5 days for laden camels
4 days for laden camels
7 days for laden camels
4 days for laden camels
NUBIAN DESERT
ABBADEH
BISHARIN
John Bartholomew & Co. Edin.

XXI

KOSHEH, *Sept.* 10.

As I was breakfasting in my *tokul* this morning, some one galloped into the correspondents' camp bringing the very welcome information that we were all to get ready to march to-morrow. At last our wearisome leisure is over, and after months of idle waiting (idle for correspondents only) on this arid, dusty, storm-swept wilderness, permission has been given to the representatives of the Press to push on to the front, which signifies—as it appears to be the rule to keep us back at the base until the last moment—that the advance on Dongola has commenced in earnest. For a week and more there have been sure signs to show that this step was imminent. Even as just before our advance on Ferkeh there was a concentration of troops at the advanced base, so now the infantry, cavalry, and artillery that have been scattered along our line of communication between this and Wady Halfa, with the object of economizing transport during the long period of inactivity, have been marched southward to concentrate at Kosheh, only the garrisons barely necessary to guard the different stations on the road

having been left behind. Again, while the troops have been collecting here, battalion after battalion of infantry, squadron after squadron of cavalry have been pushed on from here to occupy first Absarat and next Dulgo, our advanced post fifty miles from Kosheh camp, from which, so far as I can gather, the field force, as soon as it has been collected, will at once commence its southward march into the province of Dongola.

The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Brigades of infantry —that is, the entire infantry division we had with us in the Ferkeh fight—is now in occupation of Dulgo. There, too, are three squadrons of cavalry, several companies of the camel corps, two batteries of artillery, and the Maxim battery. A fourth brigade has now been formed, under the command of Major E. F. David, R.M.L.I., consisting of the 1st, 5th, and 15th battalions, of which the 1st battalion is already at Dulgo, while the other two battalions will, I believe, march with us to-morrow. So we shall now have at Dulgo thirteen out of the sixteen battalions composing the Egyptian army. Of the three battalions yet to be accounted for, the 16th will remain at Suakin, while the 14th (composed of black recruits) and the 6th will be distributed among the permanent garrisons on the line of communication between Assuan and Kosheh. In short, the entire Egyptian army, with the exception of the 16th battalion, will be engaged on the Dongola expedition. Two companies of the Staffordshire Regiment arrived here by train yester-

day. The remaining companies are expected to-day. The men look hard and fit, despite their long confinement in a cholera camp; but I am glad to say that they are not to undertake the trying and often dangerous march from here across the desert to Sadin Fanti, but will be carried up by some of the steamers. Kosheh, as the terminus of the railway, and the port of embarkation for the steamers and sailing-boats, will be our supply base, and here will be maintained the largest garrison on the line of communication north of Dulgo, consisting of the 6th battalion with details. The following will be the other permanent garrisons:—Assuan, two companies of infantry; Korosko, two companies; Murat Wells, one company; Wady Halfa, reservists and details; Sarras, 100 recruits; Ambigol Wells, 100 garrison artillery; Akasheh, 100 garrison artillery; Absarat, 100 garrison artillery.

Glad indeed are we all who have been halting through this summer in the Nubian desert—tormented by the most trying season experienced in the memory of man—to push on again and enter upon the really exciting and interesting phase of the campaign. Those who have been prostrated by sickness have recovered their strength in a trice at the very prospect of it. We shall soon have marched across what yet remains in front of us of this broad, dismal frontier belt, which the Dervishes have devastated and almost depopulated so as to leave a useless waste between Egypt and themselves, and on which no invading army can procure

supplies of any description. But, this once passed, we shall enter the fertile and even in these days populous province of Dongola—it is to be hoped before the Dervishes have time to carry away or destroy the produce—and there we ought at least to find cattle, goats, dates, and *dhurra*, and, if the tales of the refugees prove to be true, gardens of oranges, lemons, pomegranates, and bananas. But in the villages of these frontier districts of Mahass' and Sukkot it is only now and again that one can purchase as much as an egg or a fowl from such of the wretched inhabitants as the Dervishes have left here.

After all our various disappointments it might be rash to say that the ill luck which has for so long beset the expedition has passed away; but it certainly looks as if this were the case. The wind has been blowing, steady and fresh, from the north for ten days and more, and there is every indication of settled, fine weather. The railway has been repaired and the trains run regularly. The final preparations are being hurried on, and all night long the clanging of hammers on iron plates tells us that gangs of men are working on the new gunboats, the brilliant rays of a Wells light enabling the men both on board and on shore to work as easily as if they were under broad daylight. We correspondents, having received our orders, are this afternoon getting all ready for our to-morrow's march. Such of us as have boats—three of our boats have been wrecked—are loading them with reserves of supplies and

forage. As permission has now been given to us to draw forage at the different military posts, we are not called upon to carry more than two days' supply of it on our camels. We shall therefore be able to load the beasts with an abundance of provisions, and are prepared to accompany a flying column to Korti or beyond, if allowed to do so, without drawing on the commissariat. The correspondents have decided to travel together to-morrow. As we are not compelled to accompany the troops, we shall not pass through Sadin Fanti, but shall strike directly across the desert from here to Absarat, a distance of forty miles.

Since writing the above I have heard that some detachments of troops have left or are leaving Dulgo for Fereig, fifteen miles further south, and it seems probable that the field force will concentrate at that place, instead of at Dulgo, before advancing on the Dervish positions near Abu Fatmeh; but where our fighting will be, if fighting there be at all, it is impossible to say. Of the enemy's movements we have heard little of late. A cavalry patrol of ours a few days since came across a body of mounted Dervishes near Kaibar, but the latter retreated on seeing our men. A good deal is known of the organization of the Dervish forces at Dongola. Their numbers I am unable to state, but I understand that no fewer than sixty-six Baggara Emirs lead the troops of the regular army, while there are fifty-two Emirs in command of the Shaigia, Jaalin, Danagla, and other local tribes; but of these fifty-

two, only the chief Emir of the Shaigia and some half-dozen other chiefs are known to be devoted to the Dervish cause. The sympathies of the remainder are supposed to be with the invader. The force is thus made up. There are four *rubs* (brigade is the nearest English equivalent) of swordsmen and spearmen, of which the first two *rubs* are composed exclusively of men of the formidable Baggara tribe; the third *rub*—commanded by Osman Azrak—is composed for the most part of Danagla, and the fourth *rub* of Jaalin and Shaigia. A considerable number of Baggara are to be found in both *rubs* three and four, and it is said that the Baggara outnumber the Jaalin and Shaigia put together. In addition to these are the Jehadia and *Mulazemin*, which are independent units, but detachments of which, in action, act in concert with the different *rubs*. The Jehadia—black and Arab riflemen—are divided into three *rubs*, their Emirs being assisted by a small body of Taaisha Arabs, whose duty it is to observe the conduct of the black riflemen who are known to be disaffected. The *Mulazemin*, or bodyguard of the Emir-in-chief, Wad el Bishara, is composed of five companies of well-armed blacks and Arabs. The Tobgia—Dervish artillery—at Dongola consists of six mountain guns and one Nordenfeldt machine gun under the direction of an old Egyptian artilleryman. The Khayala, or cavalry, are mostly Baggara, and are armed with swords and spears, while the camelmen are mostly Jaalin, Danagla, and Taaisha. The small steamer,

the *El Tahira*, which is in possession of the Dervishes, sometimes carries a mountain gun. Built by Gordon at Khartum during the siege, it is now in a dilapidated condition, and the rashest Baggara admiral would scarcely venture to employ it against our formidable flotilla. According to recent reports, we shall find a strong Dervish garrison—horse, camelmen, riflemen, spearmen, and two guns—under the Emir Ahmed Munji at Hafir, which is just above the Hannek cataract, and also a force of riflemen, spearmen, swordsmen, camelmen, and horsemen in the fort at Kerman.

As I write this there are signs of activity all round me in the camp, and detachments of troops are marching by my *tokul* to enter the *khor* which leads across the desert to Absarat; a number of horse artillery have just passed, whose guns will be carried up to Dulgo on the steamers, and now I see approaching, through a cloud of dust, the remaining five squadrons of the Egyptian cavalry, also on their way to the front. The Sirdar and his staff will proceed to Absarat by steamer the day after to-morrow.

XXII

FEREIG, *Sept.* 15.

FOR the last three days our force has been pushing on, brigade after brigade, from Kosheh to Fereig, which brings us seventy miles nearer to the city of Dongola and in touch with the Dervish outposts. To-morrow the arrival here of the newly-formed 4th Brigade will complete the concentration of our field force, and all will be ready for an immediate advance. Permission had been given to correspondents to go to the front, so on the evening of Friday the 11th some of us set out from Kosheh to follow the direct desert route to Absarat, a distance of thirty-seven miles. The troops that had preceded us have worn a well-defined track across the waste of sands and stones, while the telegraph wire now lies along the ground, so that it is easy to find one's way by daylight; but on a dark, moonless night, such as this was, there was some risk of getting lost. We had ridden about fourteen miles when we saw ahead of us the red glow of a camp fire, and knew that we had reached the first of the watering-places that have been established for the supply of the troops

marching on this road. Here a number of "fantasses" (camel water-tanks) have been set down in the open desert, and each day camels bring up water from the nearest point on the Nile to fill them. On nearing the tanks we heard the groaning of many camels, and found that Captain Tudway, with five companies of his camel corps, 560 men in all, were halting here on their way to the front.

At 2 a.m., when they resumed their march, I rode on with them. Camels when made to rise or to lie down for the purpose of loading or unloading give vent to dreadful groans as of rage or agony, and a party of the camel corps when preparing for the halt or the march would betray its presence to an enemy several miles distant by the dismal clamour of the beasts. But once on the march nothing can be more silent than the progress of these softly-stepping creatures; their large spongy feet fall noiseless on the stony ground, they raise no cry, and of a dark night a straggler might entirely lose the column when within thirty yards of it.

As soon as the beginning of the dawn gave me enough light to see the track I left my friends and cantered on to the second watering-place, which is about twelve miles distant from the first. On the way I came across some Egyptian soldiers who had fallen out on the march during the night. Two or three of them were lying on the ground literally dying of thirst. One was so near death that the expectant vultures were wheeling round his head.

Some of the other correspondents had now come up, so we were able to give the men water from our bottles and take them on to the watering-place on our camels. At the watering-place we found the two battalions to which they belonged halting, the 1st and the 5th. The officers told us that they had lost eight of their men in the night, and were sending out parties to find them and bring them in. The Egyptain soldier trudges on with a patient, dogged resolution until he is completely exhausted; he then falls out without uttering a word and lays him down, if not found within a few hours, to perish of thirst. The 1st Brigade had a terrible experience, which I described in my last letter, while marching along this road a few weeks ago, several men dying on the way. Of the soldiers composing this force a large number have recently been in hospital, and nearly all have been weakened by the terribly severe fatigue duties in which they have been constantly engaged for the last six months; the result is that their marching powers are not what they were, and that they are absolutely unfit to undertake long desert marches. Had this been a British expedition it would have probably cost £5,000,000; an attempt has been made to carry it through on a tenth of that sum; the docile Egyptian soldiers are the sufferers, and, while piastres are saved, the lives of fine men are sacrificed. I may mention here that this economical system of conducting a campaign is now imposing a severe tax on the British officers in the Egyptian

army, who, fond of their men as they are, spend a good deal of money in ministering to their comfort and alleviating their sufferings.

After a halt of some hours I rode off at midday with a companion to complete the last stage to Absarat. We crossed a very rough country, where gaunt, bare hills were scattered over the undulating waste of rock and sand. Several broad and deep *khors*, or dry watercourses, in whose sandy bottoms thorn bushes grew, showed that after heavy rain-storms great torrents rush across this portion of the desert. The last stage of the desert road had evidently been a trying one for our transport camels; the track was strewn with their dead bodies, from which the loathsome-looking vultures rose sluggishly as we approached. At last, at about four in the afternoon, we saw before us, a few miles off, the broad Nile with its palm-lined banks, and in another hour we had selected a camping-place outside the village of Absarat. This village is in ruins and appears to have been long depopulated; but the dates were ripe upon the palm-trees, and very good we found them, after having been so long without fruit or vegetables. At Absarat we found a small permanent garrison. The place was full of rumours of Dervish movements. We were told that parties of Dervish horsemen were in the immediate neighbourhood on our side of the river, and that others were on the west bank. We afterwards ascertained that these reports were well founded, and on the following afternoon, while we

were riding along the Nile bank near Kederma, our old foeman Osman Azrak was on the opposite bank —though we knew nothing of this at the time— raiding villages and capturing sheikhs suspected of being friendly to us.

We bivouacked under the date-trees, and at five o'clock on Sunday morning set out for Dulgo, fourteen miles higher up the river, to which place the Sirdar and his staff were at the same time proceeding by steamer. We rode by several ruined and deserted villages and saw many of the large, turreted, castle-like farmhouses of the former inhabitants scattered along the further shore, testifying to the former prosperity of the country. On reaching the outskirts of Dulgo we found the greater portion of the Egyptian infantry encamped there, the river bank being crowded for miles with men and transport animals. I understood on leaving Kosheh that we should have a three days' halt at Dulgo, but on my arrival found that the force was to proceed that afternoon to Kederma, about eight miles further on, and thence march to Fereig on the following morning. At four o'clock in the afternoon commenced the bustle of a large camp breaking up, and shortly afterwards the troops were streaming up the Nile bank, raising a great cloud of dust which obscured the country for miles, and which most probably greatly impressed the Emir Osman Azrak, who at the time was, with his following of Dervish horsemen, watching us from the other side of the Nile. We now entered a country far richer than any we had

yet seen since leaving Lower Egypt. In almost any other part of the world such a country would not have struck a traveller as being particularly fertile; but after one has lived for six months in the Nubian desert even a little verdure rejoices the eye and elicits exclamations of admiration. On our left, it is true, still extended the irreclaimable desert on which not a blade of grass grew; but on our right stretched a broad green belt of date-palms loaded with fruit, meads of long lush grass that afforded excellent pasture for our animals, here and there fields of maize and cotton, the first signs of cultivation we had seen since leaving Wady Halfa. And once more, too, we heard the weird droning of the water-wheels that drew the water from the Nile to irrigate the crops.

We had now passed the devastated and depopulated frontier provinces and were entering the cultivated province of Dongola. The local population is here considerable. Some thousands of men, women, and children stood along our whole line of march gazing at what must have been to them a most imposing spectacle; a procession of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and transport numbering about 16,000 men. The soldiers, eager at the prospect of a fight, had forgotten all their recent hardships and killing fatigue duties, and were marching with a fine swing, both Egyptians and blacks, singing their songs cheerily in chorus, waving their rifles, and displaying a splendid enthusiasm. The inhabitants were evidently delighted to see the invaders, for

they knew that once the Egyptian army was between them and their Dervish oppressors they had nothing more to fear. The men clapped their hands and shouted, the women uttered the shrill lu-luing which is with these people the song of rejoicing, and even the little naked children piped their welcome to us. The people showed complete confidence in the troops, whose conduct is indeed admirable. Fondness of children is a striking trait of the Egyptian character, and both fellahin and blacks are exceedingly kind to them. Thus, while on this march, the good-natured soldiers were filling up the hands of the little children with the biscuits they themselves could ill spare. The marching to the front of this fine force, in such high spirits, confident of victory, was a sight to be remembered. In one of my early letters I spoke of the *esprit de corps* and proper soldierly pride that is beginning to manifest itself throughout the ranks of the fellahin soldiery. I heard a story while crossing the desert from Koshēh which illustrates this. Up to the last stage of that trying march not one of the transport corps —a hastily-raised levy of untrained men, who have been terribly overworked for many months—had fallen out; then one of them threw himself down on the sands. An officer, not knowing how utterly worn out the poor fellow was, urged him to rise and push on to the watering-place, which was not far off. "Don't let it be said that a transport man has fallen out," he said, to cheer him on. "Let us show the soldiers our corps can beat them all at marching."

"That is so," said the man, "I will not be the one to disgrace my fellows;" he rose to his feet and contrived to march on with the rest to the halting-place, when he at once dropped down and died. The economy of our Government is now breaking many such hearts as his out here.

While the Egyptian troops were marching up the river bank cheering and singing, four gunboats steamed abreast of them on which were embarked the men of the Staffordshire Regiment. The Dervish spies, of whom there must have been some among the amazed spectators, seeing so large a force trooping on one side of them and this flotilla steaming up on the other side, will have a startling report to make to Wad el Bishara. My companion and myself selected a snug corner for our night's bivouac outside Kederma. It seemed strange to us, after having lived so long in the depopulated country, to hear the crying of babies, the shrill gossip of women, and the lowing of cattle in the neighbouring village. In the middle of the night there was a false alarm and a great tumult throughout the camp. My servant woke me to say that the Dervishes were upon us, but we discovered that some stampeding mules or camels had been responsible for the panic.

We rose at dawn yesterday and rode into Fereig with the troops, a distance of about ten miles. We were followed by a long stream of men, women, and children, carrying with them their limited belongings, and driving before them cattle, goats, and

sheep. These were the villagers of Fereig who had fled to Dulgo a few days ago on the approach of a body of Dervishes despatched by Wad el Bishara to collect the cattle and able-bodied men. My companion and myself rode by battalion after battalion, and we observed that the British sergeants marched with their men to set them a good example, though donkeys or camels were at their disposal. Throughout that terrible march across the desert from Kosheh which cost the 1st Brigade so many men, the three English sergeants attached to the brigade tramped it sturdily all the way, and it may well be supposed that a thirty-seven miles' march on a very rough desert track in intensely hot weather, with frequent violent dust-storms rendering the air almost impossible to breathe, is a very creditable feat. We reached Fereig at an early hour yesterday morning, unloaded our camels on the site set apart for us as our camp, and then went in search of news. It seems that the Dervishes intend to fight us at Kerman; they have again reinforced that place, and it is reported that Wad el Bishara himself is coming down from Dongola to command his men in person. Dervishes are still in this neighbourhood. This morning the men of our camel corps outpost three miles out perceived a party of Dervish horsemen. At five this morning our eight squadrons of cavalry under Major Burn Murdoch made a reconnaissance to the south. I applied for permission to accompany them, but this was refused by the Sirdar, as I anticipated. Between 100 and 200

Dervish horsemen were raiding the villages to the south of us. They contrived to avoid our cavalry and escaped with the exception of nine men, who formed their advance guard, and of whom six were killed. An Emir engaged in a plucky hand-to-hand fight with one of our cavalrymen, and was shot by Captain Whitla. This afternoon Ali Kabr, the Kababish sheikh, captured two Dervish boats six miles above this. The thirty Dervishes on board, after firing a few shots, landed and took to flight. They had been despatched by Wad el Bishara to seize all the grain and cattle on the large island of Arduan, where there are several villages and a considerable cultivation. One of our steamers, the *Tamai*, with Commander Colville in command, and forty men of the Staffordshire Regiment and twenty of the 12th Sudanese on board, also steamed up the river, this afternoon—correspondents were not allowed to go with her. The officers landed on Arduan Island and were received with cries of joy by the inhabitants, who would have been despoiled of all their property had it not been for the timely arrival of the Government troops. These people seized one of the Dervish raiders when the party took to flight and handed him over to us as a prisoner. It is uncertain as I write whether we march forward this afternoon or to-morrow.

XXIII

HAFIR, *Sept.* 21.

SOME time back the Sirdar said that the Egyptian army would celebrate the longest reign of any British sovereign by entering the town of Dongola on the 23rd of this month; and there can be little doubt now that this prediction will be fulfilled. Since writing my last letter at Fereig our advance has been rapid. On the 17th our whole force, with the exception of the 5th battalion, which was left to guard the line of communication, marched to Bargi, a distance of about ten miles. On this and the subsequent marches the cavalry and horse artillery covered the front, while the camel corps marched in column on our left flank. The four brigades marched in as extended a formation as the nature of the ground allowed, in columns of double companies whenever that was possible. Our force was now as mobile as so large a body of men could possibly be; the organization was admirable; all heavy baggage had been left behind, and none but hospital tents were carried. Since we left Fereig our cavalry were constantly in touch with the Dervishes, of whom about 200 horsemen hovered

THE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE LEAVING FEREIG AT DAYBREAK ON THE WAY TO HAFIR.

round us and kept Wad el Bishara well informed as to our movements. The march to Bargi took us through a pretty country, and I began to realize that the accounts I had heard of the great fertility of the Dongola province had not been exaggerated. We traversed a green land of palms and bush and lush pasture, and round each village were fields of cotton, beans, and ripening maize. The inhabitants stood in crowds outside each village, ragged and miserable-looking creatures, who welcomed the troops with shrill cries of delight. During our march to Bargi we saw nothing of the gunboats, as they steamed up the western channel on the further side of the island of Arduan, which is three miles broad.

We bivouacked on the river bank and resumed our march at dawn on the 18th. We heard from the villagers that nearly the whole Dongola force, amounting to 4000 men, under Wad el Bishara himself and about fifty Emirs, was awaiting us at Kerman, so we looked forward to a warm engagement on the morrow. From Bargi we marched across the desert for ten miles, avoiding a deep bend of the Nile. On reaching the river bank again we found the steamers awaiting us. Here the men of the Staffordshire Regiment disembarked. We halted till three in the afternoon and then marched to our bivouac eight miles off, on the river bank, opposite the island of Tunbus. This day was the hottest and most oppressive we have had for a long time; the route for the most part lay across

soft sand; but the men of the Staffordshire Regiment displayed excellent marching qualities and their pace was remarkably fast. The men have recently been engaged in repairing the railway line, and their hard work with pick and shovel has put them in good training; they look and are as fit as men can be. At Tunbus, unfortunately, one of our gunboats, the *El Teb*, grounded on a shoal, and I believe she has not yet been got off.

On Saturday, the 19th, we marched at 4 a.m. We passed through Abu Fatma, now in ruins, at dawn, and were then but four miles from Kerman. Our hopes of a brush with the enemy were now shattered by the information we here received from the inhabitants. Wad el Bishara, we were told, had transported his entire force, guns and supplies, across the river in the night and now occupied Hafir on the west bank. At six o'clock we passed the fort which Wad el Bishara recently constructed at Kerman, a large square enclosure with stout mud walls loopholed, a place which, if well defended by his riflemen, would have cost us many men. I now rode up to a sandy hill on the river bank where our artillery was taking up its position, and saw the first shot fired by one of our Krupp guns at 6.30. I have already telegraphed a fairly full description of this day's fight. It was certainly a unique engagement. Our force of 15,000 men sat idle on the sands under the burning sun, our artillery alone coming into action, and we watched a spirited encounter between our gunboats and the very deter-

mined enemy on the further bank. At this point the Nile is between 2000 and 3000 yards wide. In front of us were several large flat green islands, with villages, cultivated fields, and pastures, on which were grazing numbers of cattle and goats. The low further bank of the Nile is lined with palm trees, and here, close to the village of Hafir, extended the enemy's defensive works. Wad el Bishara has throughout displayed good generalship, and more especially did he do so in his selection of this position and in his method of fortifying it, which would have done credit to a European engineer. A continuous line of shelter trenches ran along the river bank, with loopholed mud walls so low that they afforded but a small mark to our gunners. Both to the north and south of this position were deep morasses, across which our men could have progressed but very slowly, had we landed a force and attempted to storm the entrenchments. Bishara had with him five small brass guns captured at Khartum. They were served by eight Egyptian gunners, two of whom had formed part of Hicks Pasha's ill-fated force ; the other six, one of whom had been a captain in the Egyptian army, were with Gordon at the fall of Khartum. Their lives were spared by the Dervishes; and they have been compelled for all these years to serve in the Mahdist army. They contrived to conceal themselves when Bishara evacuated Hafir, and came over to us on Sunday morning, greatly rejoiced at having regained their liberty. They stated that

they would have been put to death had they refused to fire on us, but that they were careful to take very bad aim; however that may be, they made very good practice on our gunboats. The Dervishes also had two Nordenfeldt guns at Hafir; they probably jammed, as they were only in action for a short time. On the left of the Dervish earthworks lay moored to the bank the small gunboat which Gordon had built during the siege of Khartum, and about twenty-five large sailing-vessels, some of which appeared to be of forty tons burden. These we knew were laden with the whole of the grain that had been brought down from Dongola for the supply of Bishara's force.

The engagement, as I have said, opened at 6.30. For an hour our guns shelled the Dervish position with apparently very little effect. Their five guns replied, but all their shot fell short. The riflemen opened fire upon us from their shelter trenches with Remingtons and Martini-Henrys, but at this long range few of their bullets reached us and we had no casualties. But at seven o'clock Commander Colville came up with his little fleet of three gunboats; the *Tamai* was his flagship, while Lieutenant Beatty, R.N., and Captain Oldfield, Royal Marine Artillery, commanded the *Abu Klea* and the *Metemmeh* respectively, and now a really exciting engagement commenced. Commander Colville's orders were that he should bombard the enemy's works, cut out their sailing-boats if possible, and then steam up the river to Dongola, thirty miles

distant. The gunboats followed the main channel of the river, under the western bank. Looking across the intervening islands, we saw each ship in turn steam up till she was abreast of the enemy's forts and rifle-pits, deliver a well-directed fire at a distance of about 400 yards from her Krupps, Nordenfeldts, and Maxims, and then drop down stream again till practically out of range. These manœuvres were employed throughout the engagement, and well it was so, for every vessel would have gone to the bottom had they remained long exposed to the heavy fire with which the Dervishes replied. I saw the rifle bullets plashing into the water round each vessel as she came within range, while the five Dervish guns made excellent practice, and it was obvious to us that some of their shells attained their mark. While the gunboats were thus employed our shore batteries co-operated by pouring their heavy fire on the Dervish position, but we did not succeed in silencing the enemy's fire. The defenders stuck to their guns with a splendid bravery, and their hot fire, as we afterwards ascertained, inflicted considerable damage on our gunboats. The bullets pattered against their sides and pierced all the deck cabins and other woodwork. One shell struck the *Abu Klea* between wind and water and entered her magazine; happily the shell was faulty and did not burst, so the Dervishes were not gratified by beholding the blowing-up of one of our vessels. Three shells also struck the *Metemmeh*, one passing through her smoke-stack, one through

her cabin, and one through the gun shield at her bow. The casualties were numerous. Early in the day Commander Colville was shot through the wrist, but he continued to command his vessel; Armourer-Sergeant Richardson was killed, and twelve other men were wounded; many had very narrow escapes; a bullet, for example, passed through Lieutenant Beatty's helmet, and another grazed his leg. The enemy's losses must have been heavy, and we saw a large body of Dervish cavalry and camel corps retire for some distance into the desert, evidently with the object of getting out of range. They were shelled by our shore batteries and lost some men before they got away.

For three hours our gunboats were thus engaged, but they failed, accurate though their fire was, to silence our determined enemy. Then at 9 a.m. Colonel Parsons was ordered to take two field batteries, one horse battery, and the Maxim battery, with an escort of two companies of the 10th Sudanese battalion, to the further side of the large island of Artaghasi, where they would only have the main channel 1200 yards broad between them and the enemy. The Nile, having already subsided considerably, has left bare a somewhat swampy isthmus between the main shore and the island, across which the guns were carried without any difficulty. The guns took up their position on the westernmost point of the island, directly opposite to the Dervish defences. On riding over to this

point I found our gunners busily engaged with the enemy. At this comparatively short range the fire was very effective. I saw several shells plug their fort, and the mud walls which sheltered the riflemen were knocked about a good deal; but still we were unable to silence the fire of the enemy, for whose extraordinary pluck we could not but entertain the highest admiration. Their riflemen opened a hot fire on us from their loopholes, but even at the range of 1200 yards nearly all their bullets passed over our heads; the Dervishes have shortened all their rifle barrels by about a foot so as to diminish their weight, but have placed no foresights on them, with the result that they always fire high. Three of our men, however, were wounded on the island, one of whom subsequently died. One of our shells struck the Dervish steamer below the water line; she gradually heeled over until her deck faced us, then sank in shallow water, so that a portion of her side is still visible.

At ten o'clock our guns and Maxims on the island opened a still brisker fire on the enemy, and the men of the 10th Sudanese fired occasional volleys. I saw three shells in succession strike the enemy's redoubts, which most probably dismounted the guns, for their fire was silenced for the time. It was immediately after this that the three gunboats steamed in line past the enemy's works, delivered their final shots under a heavy musketry fire from the Dervish entrenchments, and proceeded triumphantly up the river to reach Dongola before

sunset. After this the firing became intermittent on both sides. Occasionally parties of Dervishes made attempts to reach their flotilla of boats with the object of carrying off their grain, but were driven back by our Maxims. Throughout the night we opened fire at intervals on the river bank in the neighbourhood of the boats and succeeded in keeping the Dervishes off, so the whole of their large supply of grain fell into our hands on the following day. In the evening some Berberis swam across the river, and from them we learnt that the enemy's losses had been heavy, that Wad el Bishara had been severely wounded in the head and shoulder by a shell, and that Osman Azrak had also received a dangerous wound.

Early on Sunday morning I saw men shaking out the large lateen sails of the Dervish boats, and soon the whole flotilla got under way and sailed across to our side of the river. At the same time hundreds of people came out of the village of Hafir and lined the Nile bank, waving cloths as if to welcome us. It was evident that the Dervishes had evacuated the place. I ascertained from the Intelligence Department that Bishara, misled by some of our spies, who had caused him to believe that it was our intention to continue our march along the east bank, had evacuated Hafir with all his men, animals, stores, and ammunition at three in the morning, and was now marching on Dongola to oppose our passage of the river at that place. The Dervish general must have been quite unprepared

for our next move. The enemy being now well on their way to Dongola by a desert route which avoids the Nile, the Sirdar gave orders that our entire force should cross the river to Hafir with the utmost despatch. We had long wondered at what point we should effect our passage of the Nile, and had expected to meet with opposition and to lose many men; but the successful ruse by which Bishara was outwitted enabled us to accomplish this difficult task without firing a shot. Throughout the day and for a great part of the night our gunboats and the captured Dervish vessels sailed backwards and forwards from bank to bank, transporting across the broad rushing stream our men, animals, supplies, and baggage. The organization was so perfect that this large force was embarked and disembarked without any confusion. It was, indeed, a most creditable performance; but the Sirdar is, undoubtedly, an admirable organizer, and with him as leader the Egyptian army is, for its size, the most mobile in the world.

I crossed early in the day, and found the villagers ostentatiously plucking from their clothes the dark square patches that mark the followers of the Mahdi. The women were more enthusiastic than the men; they uttered their shrill lu-luing, seized our hands, and would have embraced us had not their unloveliness led us to keep them somewhat aloof. I saw the poor Egyptian gunners who have for the last twelve years been the cruelly-treated slaves of the Khalifa. Their joy at their release was most

affecting to behold. At four p.m. the three gunboats returned, after having thrown a few shells into Dongola, which they found abandoned by the enemy. They had captured several boats laden with grain, and it is supposed that we now have in our possession the bulk of Bishara's grain supply. Of ammunition also he can have but little left. The Kababish camelmen who were impressed to carry the Dervish ammunition deserted after the evacuation of Hafir, and dropped all their loads in the desert. We have recovered most of this, some hundreds of cases of rifle ammunition, and seventy-two boxes of Nordenfeldt ammunition, which had fallen into the Mahdi's hands when Hicks Pasha's force was annihilated. This morning the remainder of our force crossed the river, and I hear that we shall march this evening on Dongola, which is twenty-eight miles distant by land. The Dervishes, we understand, are awaiting us there, and intend to fight.

September 22, 10 A.M.

As no mail went out yesterday I re-open my letter at our halting-place, five miles from the town of Dongola, to add an account of what we have been doing up to the present moment. Our force left Hafir at five o'clock yesterday evening, and, after marching twelve miles in columns of double companies across open desert ground, bivouacked near the river bank opposite the great island of

Argo, the inhabitants of which shouted their welcomes across the river and lit bonfires to show their joy.

At 4.30 this morning the column marched again to a large village some miles further on and almost within sight of Dongola. The troops are now resting here, and unless the Dervishes take to flight, which is unlikely, we shall probably attack them at dawn to-morrow. Our gunboats are now in front of Bishara's position, and as I write this I hear occasional artillery firing. Bishara, we understand, is determined to die fighting, and it is possible that he will attack our camp to-night. This is an extensive village, surrounded by great fields of magnificent maize and groves of date-palms, but the old irrigation furrows stretching far into what is now desert land show that here, as throughout the province of Dongola, not one-tenth of the land which produced rich crops in former days is now cultivated. On first arriving at the village I only saw one native; he said that all the inhabitants, fearing the vengeance of the defeated Dervishes, are taking refuge on the island of Argo.

XXIV

DONGOLA, *Sept.* 24.

AT last this campaign has come to an end, and yesterday morning our force occupied the city of Dongola without encountering any but the feeblest opposition from the Dervish force of between five and seven thousand men which was there awaiting us. This was not what we expected, for we knew from our spies that Wad el Bishara had held a council of war with his chief Emirs at which it was decided to offer a determined resistance and to pursue the old Mahdist tactics of hurling the Baggara horsemen on our advancing infantry in a series of the well-known desperate Dervish charges. We also knew that the enemy were busily employed in throwing up earthworks to the north of Dongola, near the old village of Yunes. The Sirdar wisely decided to give the troops a complete rest before engaging in what promised to be a long day's severe fighting; the whole force, accordingly, was halted on the Nile bank at the village of Zarawatt—which we understood was six, but which proved to be ten, miles north of Dongola—from ten o'clock on the morning of September 22 until about 4.30 yesterday morning.

On the 21st our gunboat, the *Abu Klea*, commanded by Lieutenant Beatty, R.N., was sent to Dongola to observe the Dervish movements. He shelled the enemy's positions and drove some of the Jehadia riflemen out of their entrenchments with his shrapnel. On the 22nd the *Metemmeh*, commanded by Captain Oldfield, R.M.A., and later on the *Tamai*, with Commander Colville in command, joined the other gunboat. They shelled the enemy's redoubts and entrenchments. The enemy replied with musketry fire (wounding two men on the *Abu Klea*) and with the brass guns they had brought up with them after evacuating Hafir. Our shells dismounted some of the guns, but whenever this happened the determined defenders with great rapidity mounted the guns elsewhere. Throughout the day they were moving the guns to and fro, and puzzled their attackers by continually opening fire on them from fresh positions. It was found impossible to silence these guns; but their practice was bad and none of their shells struck our boats, for the eight best Dervish gunners—the Egyptians captured after Hicks Pasha's defeat—had deserted to us at Hafir. In the evening the *Tamai* returned to Zarawatt. Those on board, judging from the preparations which they had observed, were strongly of opinion that the morrow's would be a really serious engagement and that the Dervishes, now rendered desperate, would give a very good account of themselves.

While our force was halting throughout the 22nd at Zarawatt bodies of Dervish spearmen hovered round

our outposts and exchanged shots with our cavalry and camel corps in the desert west of us. It was considered possible that a night attack would be made on our camp; but the enemy allowed us to sleep peacefully and there was no alarm. As we rose from our bivouac at three o'clock yesterday morning to prepare for our final march and fight, the new gunboat, the *Zafr*, steamed in from the north. Her fractured cylinder had been replaced and she had arrived from Kosheh just in time to take part in the coming action. She is an imposing-looking vessel; but I understand that the material of which she is built is too light, so that the discharge of her heavy guns strains and bends her thin plates and slight framework. Strict economy in all departments has been the rule on this expedition, but an over-cheap gunboat is likely soon to become unserviceable.

At 4.30 our force marched. The almost full moon still hung high in the cloudless sky and lit up a singularly beautiful scene. On our left extended along the river the long line of date-palms, their graceful fronds bending before the cool north breeze, and fields of rustling maize. Between the palms we saw the gleaming Nile, here upwards of a mile and a half in breadth, up which the steamers slowly forced their way against the strong current. To the right of the thin belt of cultivation stretched the desert, here a sandy plain, across which our force silently marched in columns of route, vaguely appearing as a great dark mass, whose limits could not be distinguished for the clouds of dust that

hovered over it. Shortly after daybreak the force deployed and got into battle formation. On our extreme left, marching near the river bank, was the 1st Brigade, under Major Lewis, three of the four battalions composing it marching in line, the fourth battalion marching in rear of them in reserve. On the right of the 1st Brigade marched in line the three battalions of the 3rd Brigade under Major Maxwell. Next came the field artillery and the Maxims supported by the Staffordshire Regiment, the men of which marched in their kharki uniforms, but the British soldiers attached to the Maxims rode in their scarlet serge tunics, affording the one bright bit of colour in the great yellow and brown mass presented by our force. Next to the field artillery marched the three battalions of the 2nd Brigade, under Major Macdonald; while on the extreme right were the camel corps, the horse artillery, and the cavalry. Each battalion of the Egyptian infantry marched in the battle formation usual here —four companies in line with two companies in reserve behind. The 4th Brigade, under Major David, formed the rear guard. Colonel Hunter thus had under him an infantry division of thirteen battalions, all of more than full strength; while Major Burn Murdoch commanded nearly a thousand cavalry, Major Tudway about 800 camel corps, and Major Parsons had eighteen guns under his direction. This large force of about 15,000 fighting men marching in battle formation presented a front two miles in length, and made one of the most

magnificent spectacles any of us present have ever witnessed. It is rarely indeed that one has the opportunity of seeing in one glance so large a body of troops; but on riding to the summit of the small stony hillocks that here and there broke the monotony of the plain I obtained a comprehensive view of the compact mass of men advancing steadily across the lonely desert, on whose sands no other human beings were in sight. The spectacle was all the more impressive because we were to a man confident that within a very short time we would be hotly engaged with the bravest and most ferocious savage warriors in the world, and that, despite our great numerical superiority, a considerable proportion of our men would be absent from the next roll-call. During the march I rode several times up and down our long line, between our left flank and our cavalry on the extreme right, and I saw that all the troops were in excellent spirits and eager for a fight. It was a very hot day, and the march was an extremely trying one across the burning sands; by the time it was over we had traversed at least fourteen miles, and the troops were seven hours in the desert before they approached the river and assuaged the thirst from which they were suffering. For there were no camels laden with water skins with us, and the men had nothing to drink save the small amount of water they carried in their bottles, which we exhausted early in the day. The Staffordshire men, despite their terrible thirst, marched with an admirable dogged pluck, buoyed up by the prospect of having

at last a brush with the enemy. They apparently endured the heat as well as the natives did; none of them had sunstroke, whereas one Egyptian soldier at least died from this cause.

As we marched we heard the sound of guns in front, so knew that the Dervishes were still holding Dongola and were engaged with our gunboats. From the commencement of the march Dervish horsemen hovered on our right flank, but did not venture to approach too near. At seven o'clock we saw occasional clouds of dust in front of us, and shortly afterwards perceived a large body of Dervish horsemen on a range of low hills—the Baggara and Jaalin warriors, who had come out to meet us. We were more confident than ever now that the Dervishes would keep their word and were about to attack us in the open. Officers on the steamers who had a better view of the enemy than ourselves afterwards told me that they then had no doubt of the enemy's intention to fall on us, and that they had never seen a finer sight—on one side our long line slowly advancing, on the other side the Mahdist force, which, though numerically so inferior to ours, produced almost as imposing an effect, drawn up as it was in regular battle array. Sometimes the enemy appeared to be advancing upon us and sometimes to be retiring. We learnt later on that the Emirs, beholding the magnitude of our army, became divided in their counsels, and that some refused to charge when ordered to do so by Wad el Bishara. At one time they stood steadily until we were less than a mile off,

when they retired in good order to take up another position not far behind. They appeared to be awaiting a favourable opportunity to make their charge.

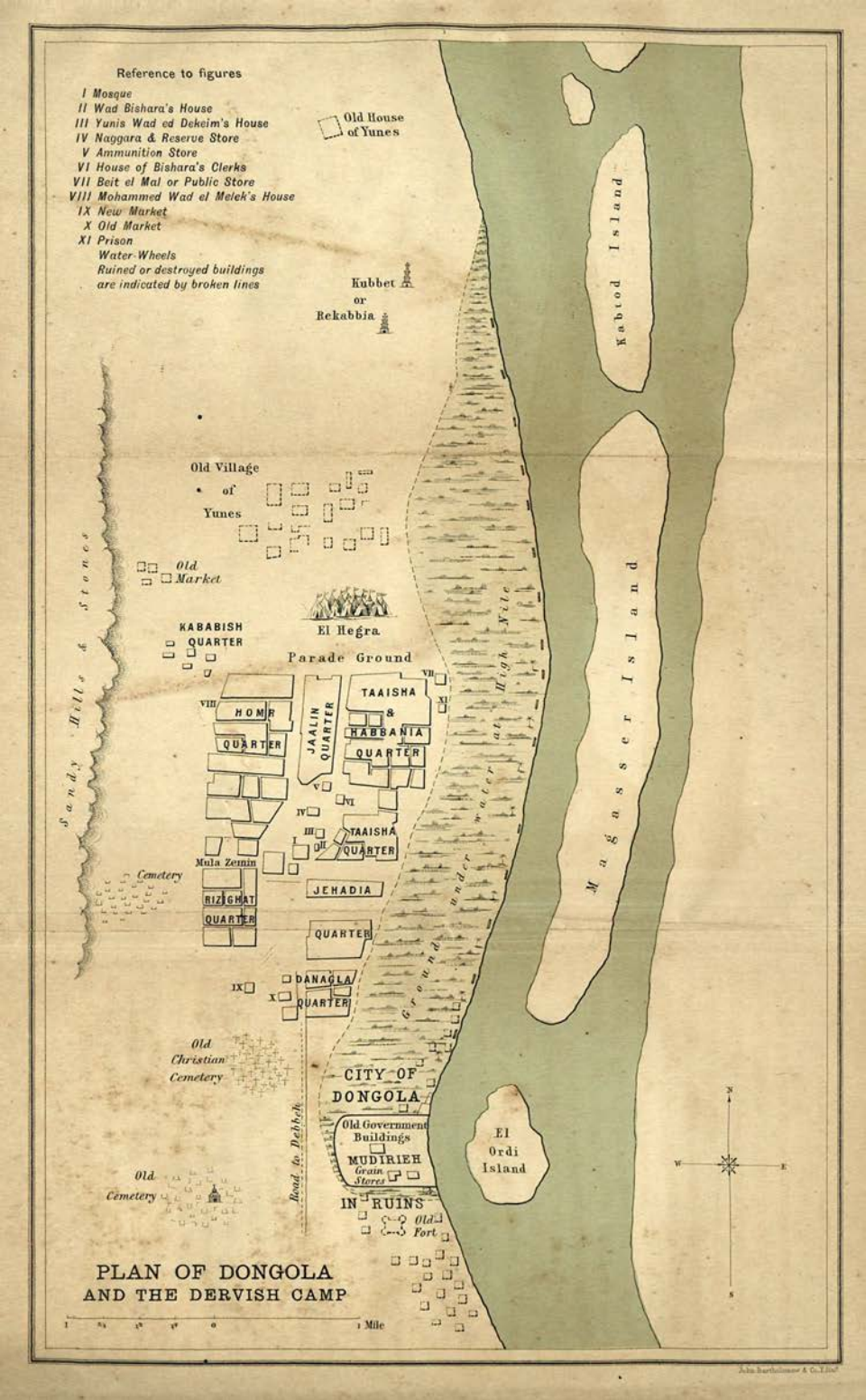
At 7.30 we halted for a short time half a mile from a large square walled enclosure, which I understand was the old house of Yunes, and also served as the Hegra, or starting-point for raiding parties. This was found to be unoccupied by the Dervishes, and the force resumed its march. At half-past eight we came to a large congregation of huts, the *deym* or permanent camp of the Baggara, Jaalin, and other Arabs. This and the remainder of the new Dervish quarters are more than a mile from the river, a morass lying between them and the Nile bank. Our scouts reported that the Dervishes had abandoned this camp, and for the first time we began to have misgivings as to whether we should have a fight at all. The enemy had evidently left the camp in haste that morning, for in the huts were quantities of guns, ammunition, swords, coats of mail, and property of various description, while horses and cattle were straying among the empty huts. They were not all quite empty, however, and some strange incidents occurred while our troops were marching by the *deym*. Lurking in some of the huts were a few Baggara, who possessed the true old Mahdist fanaticism, and, scorning to fly, were waiting there to die, determined to ensure Paradise by killing one at least of the "enemies of God." For example, four or five men armed with

spears darted out of one hut and rushed at some of our men, loudly uttering Mahdist prayers, of course refusing quarter; they were shot down before they could work any mischief. In another part of the *deym* a Dervish apparently repented of his intention to die that day, for he ran out of a hut, hit an officer's groom over the head with his bludgeon, leapt on the charger he was leading, and galloped off into the desert. Close to the *deym* we found two dead Dervishes killed by a shell from one of our gun-boats.

We still heard the guns on our vessels opening fire on distant fugitives, and saw the shells bursting in front of us, while occasionally there was a rattling from the Maxims on board; but not a shot had yet been fired by our disappointed infantry, save at the handful of fanatics concealed in the *deym*, and our chances of taking any part in the fight grew smaller and smaller. Our troops marched at a brisk pace, but could not get in touch with the cautious enemy that ever retreated before us, though occasionally drawing themselves up again in battle array as if they considered that the time had arrived to make their attack. But the Dervish charge never came. Mahdism is dead, and the honest fanatics among the Arabs opposed to us were in a very small minority; even the Baggara were not reckless enough to attempt to make a stand against so formidable a force as ours, for it would have meant annihilation for them. But Jehadia, or black riflemen, still held the strong fortifications in the city of Dongola which

we were now approaching, so our line swung round from the right, in order to surround the enemy's position. Dongola is situated on the river bank, so was separated from us by the deep swamp I have mentioned, which extends for some distance to the south of the city, running parallel to the river. At half-past nine the left of our force was nearly abreast of the town, marching along the edge of the swamp, when we heard in the distance the Zughareet or shrill cry of joyous welcome raised by a multitude of women, and saw to our surprise, waving over the old Mudirieh, formerly the Government buildings, not the Mahdist-banners, but the flag of Egypt; we therefore knew that the Jehadia garrison had surrendered. It was now that our cavalry, camel corps, and horse artillery started in pursuit of the Baggara, Jaalin, and other Arab troops who had come out into the desert to meet our force, but who were now evidently in full retreat.

Our force now marched south, skirting the morass which still lay on our left. We changed our formation and advanced with the different brigades in echelon. I was riding with the 1st Brigade, which was leading and was nearest to the swamp, when a large body of mounted Dervishes suddenly appeared among some trees in front and seemed about to sweep down on us. Major Lewis at once got his brigade in battle formation, again deploying into line, the first rank kneeling, ready to receive the charging cavalry. This was effected by the Sudanese with admirable rapidity and steadiness. One


Reference to figures
I Mosque
II Wad Bishara's House
III Yunis Wad ed Dekeim's House
IV Naggara & Reserve Store
V Ammunition Store
VI House of Bishara's Clerks
VII Beit el Mal or Public Store
VIII Mohammed Wad el Melek's House
IX New Market
X Old Market
XI Prison
Water-Wheels
Ruined or destroyed buildings are indicated by broken lines
Old House of Yunes
Kubbet or Rekabbia
Kabod Island
Old Village of Yunes
Old Market
Sandy Hills & Stones
El Hegra
KABABISH QUARTER
Parade Ground
HOMR QUARTER
JAALIN QUARTER
TAAISHA & HABBANIA QUARTER
TAAISHA QUARTER
Mula Zemin
Cemetery
RIZIGHAT QUARTER
JEHADIA QUARTER
DANAGLA QUARTER
Ground under water at High Nile
Magasser Island
Old Christian Cemetery
CITY OF DONGOLA
Old Government Buildings
MUDIRIEH
Grain Stores
IN RUINS
Old Fort
El Ordi Island
Old Cemetery
Road to Debbeh
N
W
E
S
PLAN OF DONGOLA
AND THE DERVISH CAMP
1 Mile

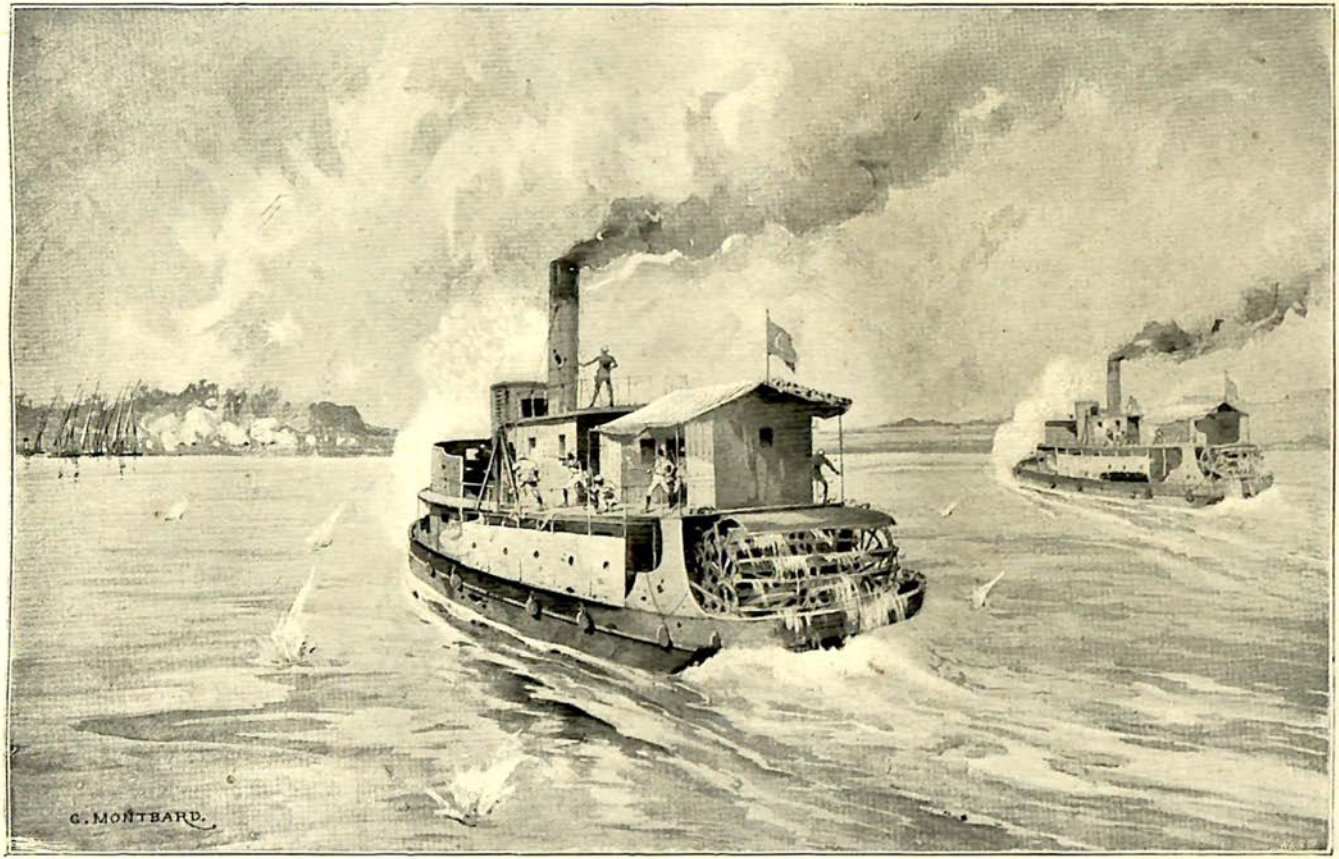
recognized at once that these were troops on which one could rely. The other brigades also hurried up to deploy on our right. But the Dervishes yet once again shirked so uneven a conflict and disappeared south in a cloud of dust. It is possible that they had no intention of charging, but were merely attempting to delay our advance, and were covering the retreat of such of their infantry as had left the town with the mounted men.

Marching on again, we turned the southernmost end of the swamp, and at eleven o'clock reached the river bank at the southern end of the city of Dongola. The Berberi inhabitants crowded round us, raising acclamations of delight, seizing and kissing our hands as we passed, carrying bowls of water to our thirsty troops, displaying in every way their gratitude to those who had delivered them from the crushing tyranny of the Baggara. They told us that they were now left without food, as the Baggara, when retiring from the town, had carried off all the grain belonging to the people. They were ragged and miserable-looking creatures, and their aspect testified to the desolating effect of the Baggara *régime*.

I now rode through the streets of this once civilized, now completely ruined, city, which presents an extraordinary and melancholy appearance; but I must leave my descriptions of Dongola to my next letter, and give some account of what was done by our gunboats on the river, and by our pursuing cavalry, camel corps, and horse artillery in the

desert, for these alone were in action this day. Correspondents were not permitted to accompany either the land pursuit or the gunboats, so we saw little of such fighting as there was—not that, when we set out in the morning, we should have elected to do otherwise than accompany the infantry, for every one then felt confident that the Dervishes intended to charge, and that the fighting line of the battalions with which we rode throughout the day would bear the brunt of the enemy's attack. But without being in any of the fighting we yet throughout the engagement had some of the excitement of fighting, for the Dervishes were ever in front of us, and our officers were at frequent intervals momentarily expecting and preparing to meet the Mahdist cavalry charge.

The part taken in the action by our gunboats was an important one. They steamed up to Dongola early in the morning, hugging the west bank in the following order:—The *Tamai*, Commander Colville's flagship, leading, the *Zafr*, the *Metemmeh*, and the unarmoured steamers *Kaibar* and *Akasha* following, the rearmost vessel steaming just in front of the infantry advance. They opened fire on the strong defences on the river bank, but the Dervish guns this day made no reply. Then they kept up a steady fire on the Arab *deym* in the desert, and afterwards on the Dervishes on the hills beyond, who were retiring before the advancing infantry. The 12-pounders on the new boat, the *Zafr*, made very good practice at a range of four miles. On



THE GUN-BOATS BOMBARDING DONGOLA.

this vessel Commander Robertson had with him Lieutenant Elkington commanding his little party of twenty-six Royal Engineers, who have worked so well at the arduous railway construction and other work for the last six months, and also thirty men of the North Staffordshire Regiment. These British soldiers were employed to man the guns. Lieutenant Beatty, too, on the *Abu Klea*, drove the Dervishes out of their principal fort—at the north end of the Mudirieh, with his shrapnel. Then at half-past nine the Jehadia garrison of the Mudirieh hoisted the white flag. These black riflemen, though ready to fight well under any master, care nothing for Mahdism, and were quite ready now that they saw the Baggara and Jaalin in full retreat across the desert to surrender to us and to enlist at once in the black battalions of the Khedive whom they had been fighting five minutes before, and in whose ranks they had so many of their own relations and friends. The Sudanese black loves fighting for its own sake, and fights against his own brothers without harbouring the least ill-will, and without feeling the slightest compunction. He is yet one of the kindliest creatures in the world when not engaged in battle, and he makes the best mercenary soldier in the world. When the white flag was hoisted, Commander Colville, though suffering a good deal from his wound, landed with Commander Robertson, Lieutenant Fitzclarence (bimbashi in the 10th Sudanese), Lieutenant Beatty, a hundred Sudanese and Egyptian soldiers from the *Tamai*, and a few

British marines, to receive the submission of the Jehadia. He then pulled down the Mahdi banners and hoisted the Egyptian flag on the Government buildings, where it has not flown since 1885. Here the Jaalin Emir, Hassan Wad el Nejumi, nephew of the famous Nejumi who fell at Toski when leading the Mahdist forces to the invasion of Egypt, came up and handed his sword to Commander Colville.

The pursuit of the enemy by our cavalry, camel corps, and horse artillery produced a very important result indeed. They pressed the Baggara horsemen so closely that the latter were compelled to leave behind them on their line of flight across the desert the greater portion of the Jehadia infantry whom they were driving before them. Our cavalry brought numbers back with them to Dongola, and throughout the night these blacks, with their wives and families, having escaped from the Baggara, or having emerged from places in which they had concealed themselves until they had received information that we were treating all prisoners with clemency, were pouring into the town to deliver themselves over to the Sirdar. We have already captured quite 900 prisoners, and of blacks alone there are sufficient to form another Sudanese battalion. On the other hand, the greater portion of the Jaalin, though disaffected and altogether disgusted with the conduct of the cruel and hypocritical Khalifa, have accompanied the Baggara on their retreat, which, it is now supposed, will be

continued to Khartum itself. That the Jaalin have acted thus is natural enough. They come from the country between Berber and Khartum; there they have their families and all their property. They would lose all by coming over to us now; but there is little doubt that they will do so when our further advance has brought our troops between the Jaalin country and the Khalifa. The Baggara horsemen offered some resistance to our pursuit, and made several charges. While thus attempting to cover the retreat of their infantry they lost six of their number killed. We had eight of our men wounded. Our officers saw several Emirs clad in armour among the fugitives, one of whom wore what appeared to be a silver coat of mail.

Thus ended what is likely to be our last encounter with the Dervishes in this campaign. It is exceedingly fortunate that in this action, if action it can be called, we killed few, if any, of our real friends, the Jehadia riflemen, whom the Baggara generally put in the forefront of the battle, thus making a most regrettable slaughter of these brave blacks unavoidable. On the other hand, though this may seem a cruel sentiment to those in England who know not the Baggara and their ways, I think it would have been an excellent thing if the Arab horsemen had charged us yesterday. Few of them would have escaped; but the Baggara are not men for whom one can entertain much pity. They are irreclaimable savages, wantonly cruel, wantonly destructive. They make a desert of the countries

they conquer. So long as their numbers remain considerable there will be no peace in the Sudan. Each crushing defeat will hasten the end and liberate enslaved populations. The annihilation of the Baggara would restore peace and prosperity to a vast region.

XXV

SHEIKH SHERIFF, *Sept.* 28.

I SHOULD like those in England who would leave the fertile provinces of the Sudan under the rule of the Baggara slave-dealers to wander through what was once the town of Dongola and ride across the wasted country that surrounds it. Dongola is in ruins; not a house in it remains whole; every building has been gutted; where once were busy streets the palms now rise above the wrecked habitations, and every thoroughfare is choked with a dense undergrowth of thorny bushes and tall, rank grass. The great bazaar, with its covered arcades, one of the chief marts of Africa, is now a heap of rubble. Of the public buildings and the handsome, well-furnished mansions of the principal merchants, the red-brick walls, with gracefully arched doors and windows, alone remain standing, while within them one can still see traces of columned corridors and delicate Eastern ornamentation. Where once extended river-side quays, swampy ground now slopes to the Nile. The broad avenue where the market used to be held has disappeared; the pleasant gardens of fruit trees and flowers have

been destroyed. For twelve years Dongola has been uninhabited; for the Baggara declared it to be —as the city of the unbelieving Turks—an accursed place, in which no man should be permitted to dwell. Those who knew the Dongola of old find it difficult now to find their way through the wrecked streets, and can scarcely recognize the houses in which they formerly lived. It is a scene of wanton destruction; the proverb says that "where the foot of the Turk has trod the grass does not grow." So is it with the Baggara. He disdains to do any work; by profession he is a robber, and destruction is his pastime; he enslaves where he does not kill, and in the place of what he destroys he creates nothing. Civilization is abhorrent to him: after plundering and destroying the city he left the bodies of the massacred and mutilated inhabitants to rot in the streets, and went out into the desert content to live the life of a savage in one of the squalid hovels of which a Dervish *deym*, or permanent camp, is composed. Now, as the visitor walks through the melancholy ruins of the once prosperous city and enters the long-abandoned habitations, he come across strange and sometimes loathsome sights. It is such a city as he has wandered through in dreams, in whose foul, deserted streets and alleys he expects at every step to come across some horrible thing.

But, after having left the city empty for so many years, the Baggara prepared for our advance by fortifying the ruins of Dongola, and, while they

themselves remained in the *deym* in the desert beyond the swamp, they stationed here a considerable garrison of Jehadia, black and Arab riflemen, the blacks largely preponderating. The character of the ground lent itself to defence; the Dervish works were very strong and were constructed by men who evidently possessed military knowledge; the hapless artillerymen of the defeated Egyptian armies, trained by British officers, had been compelled by their captors, under pain of death, to employ their skill in the service of the Khalifa. The town stretches along the river bank from north to south. On the west of it, dividing it from the desert, is a swamp a mile in breadth practically impassable for troops, which has been formed since our abandonment of Dongola twelve years ago. The Dervishes had fortified the southern end of the town between the river and the swamp by loopholing the walls of the houses and joining them together by shelter-trenches. The defences on the north side of the town, also extending from the river to the swamp, are exceedingly strong. Here the enemy had prepared for defence the stout walls of the Mudirieh and the remains of an old Egyptian fort. Beyond this they had deep shelter-trenches for their riflemen with head-cover, the loopholes being surrounded by bricks taken from the neighbouring houses. Where they could make use of the walls of the old houses they had done so with considerable ingenuity; they had banked up the wall with earth to the necessary height outside,

had dug a shelter-trench inside, and had then levelled the wall to within about 3 ft. of the top of the bank and opened loopholes through it. They had also made several gun-pits, and had mounted some guns on redoubts, the most important of which was a tower flanking the Mudirieh, directly opposite to the ruins of what had once been Lord Wolseley's house. On the side facing the river extended defences of a similar description. It was, as our officers allow, an exceedingly strong place which might have given us much trouble and on which our guns could have produced but little effect. If held by desperate men, ably directed, it might have resisted a six days' attack before it fell, and if we had stormed it from the south, the most vulnerable side, though the defenders, having no escape, would have been killed almost to a man, our own losses would certainly have been exceedingly heavy.

Of all the strange sights in weird Dongola, this Mudirieh I have spoken of, the old Government buildings under the Egyptian *régime*, and recently the Beit el Mal or public store of the Dervishes, is the strangest. Enclosed by massive fortified walls still standing, the Mudirieh is a well-built block of red-brick buildings, with great granaries, and the now roofless spacious chambers in which the Governor of Dongola held his court and his receptions. When I visited the Mudirieh on the morning after our capture of Dongola I found the once beautiful garden within it—now a sandy waste, where formerly

the pomegranate, citron, and orange trees afforded a cool shade, and where the carefully-irrigated soil was carpeted with flowers—crowded with Dervish prisoners, their wives and children. There were Baggara and other Arabs, but the large majority were Sudanese blacks. All the men wore the white Mahdist *gibbehs* with the square coloured patches, the uniform of the Dervishes. Even the baby boys were dressed in little *gibbehs* with miniature patches, and it was curious to see small Baggara who could scarcely toddle riding astride of sticks, waving reeds as spears, shrilly raising the war-cry as they imitated the wild cavalry charge of their fathers. The men numbered about five hundred, and there was a still greater number of women and children. The blacks, the Jaalin and other Arabs have since then been released, but the Baggara, of whom there are but few, still remain prisoners. The black Jehadia were very cheery, fraternized with their countrymen—our Sudanese soldiers on guard over them—whose comrades in arms many of them will shortly be, and their merry laughter showed that they were not in the least distressed at having left the Khalifa's service. The proud Baggara held aloof from the others, scowling savagely, evidently feeling intensely the indignity of their position. Their companions in captivity apparently enjoyed the helpless rage of their late oppressors, and our black soldiers, though held back from actual violence by their discipline, bearing in mind all that their people had suffered at the hands of the men of this tribe, made open

display of their hatred and thirst for vengeance. Among the prisoners, too, were some broken-down old men in ragged *gibbehs*, whose fair complexions proclaimed them to be Egyptians, soldiers of the defeated armies of Gordon, Hicks, and Slatin, long slaves of the Khalifa, who had been compelled to take up arms against their own countrymen.

In one courtyard of the Mudirieh the weapons we had captured were gathered together, and here I saw piles of rifles of various type—Martini-Henrys, Remingtons, old Tower muskets, flint-locks, match-locks, great elephant guns, quaint blunderbusses, war drums, swords, broad-bladed Dervish spears, the flags of the Emirs, shields of hippopotamus hide, and coats of mail, some of which had possibly belonged to Crusaders, while others were of modern make, from Abyssinia. Here, too, were the enemy's brass guns which they had captured from the Egyptians, and one long gun of very ancient manufacture.

In another portion of the Mudirieh I saw the Dervish public store of grain, beans, and lentils, and an extraordinary quantity of dates. In one courtyard was piled a veritable hill of dates, which I roughly measured and found to be sixty yards long, twenty yards broad, and nearly thirty feet in height. This was the accumulation of many years of raids. The dates had dried up into a sort of hard concrete, and were quite unfit for food. This gigantic waste of many thousands of pounds' worth of the chief food supply of the country had been deliberate. The Dervishes had taken forcibly and stored here

the bulk of many harvests, not for use, but with the object of keeping the population in an impoverished condition. While the dates were brought here to rot the unfortunate people were decimated by famine. Cruelty and love of destruction and waste are rival passions with the Baggara.

But the day of the Baggara is over. The Dongola army under the redoubted Wad Bishara has melted away; all the road between here and Debbeh is strewn with the property the Dervishes have thrown away during their flight; they are now following the desert route to Omdurman, enduring terrible privations according to the refugees, and of their thousands only a few hundreds are likely to survive to report themselves to their master, the Khalifa. This is the first occasion on which the Dervishes have not made a fight of it; it was with them a point of honour to make a resolute stand even when doomed to defeat; but the old fanatical spirit has almost died out. Their prestige will be destroyed by their flight from Dongola, and it is possible that the tribes they have so cruelly used, no longer fearing, will rise to exterminate them. The Mahdist cause has received a far severer blow than if the Baggara at Dongola had died bravely fighting as was their first intention. The Dongola expedition has been triumphantly successful. The Sirdar, risking nothing, has taken every step with caution; the expedition was admirably organized, the greatest difficulties have been overcome. Had the Sirdar advanced with a smaller force we should have had

severe fighting, a heavy butcher's bill, and the expedition would have possibly brought more fame to those engaged in it. But the Sirdar has done better than this. At the sacrifice of military glory, he has adopted a more humane policy; he has recovered for the Khedive the entire province of Dongola, and has effected the occupation up to its southernmost confines at Debbeh, at a minimum cost of life. Never has a campaign effected such large results with so insignificant a loss of men. There are no longer any Dervishes in the province, the local population, black, Arab, and Berberi, have thrown aside the hated *gibbeh* and rejoice at being once more placed under a settled Government. As there has, moreover, been practically no fighting the people have suffered little in this war; we have not been compelled to shoot down the black Jehadia and local levies whom the Baggara used to drive before them in the forefront of battle, and happily the local sheikhs, known to be friendly with the Government, who had been carried off by the Dervishes, contrived to effect their escape at Debbeh on the arrival there of our gunboats.

The settlement of the reconquered province will now occupy the attention of the Government. The administration will, no doubt, for several years be purely military, and will be conducted on the system which has proved so completely successful in the frontier Mudirieh, of which Wady Halfa is the capital. The fertility of the province has not been exaggerated. The soil and climate are adapted for

the cultivation of sugar, cotton, and grain, and magnificent crops can be raised. In most parts—here, for example, at Sheikh Sheriff, seven miles south of Dongola, where we are now encamped—the flat plain could be easily irrigated and brought under cultivation for many miles inland. Once the country was rich in camels and cattle, but few have been left by the Baggara. Under the Dervish rule the Berberi population has dwindled away and is now insufficient to cultivate a tithe of the land. The Berberi themselves, too, are an indolent people, keen traders but indifferent cultivators. There is therefore plenty of room here for colonists, and the resources of the country will be quickly developed if it is found practicable to bring some of the industrious fellahin peasantry from Egypt, give them grants of land, with stock and seed grain, and introduce scientific irrigation. The revenue that would be raised would soon recoup the Government for the expenses it had incurred.

But so long as the Baggara remain supreme at Omdurman Egypt will be put to the expense of maintaining a large force in this province, and it is to be hoped that the steps necessary for the complete destruction of the Khalifa's malign power will not be delayed. Now that the prestige of the Dervishes has been shattered and that all the people south of Dongola are but awaiting the arrival of our troops to join us, it needs no large and costly British expedition to attain the desired end. The Egyptian army, with a contingent of Indian troops co-operating

from Suakin, could now march on Khartum with every prospect of complete success. But the British Government should render financial assistance to Egypt, and the construction of the Korosko-Abu Hamed railway should at once be undertaken.

XXVI

ASSUAN, *Oct.* 9.

AT last, despite innumerable difficulties, the object of the Dongola expedition has been triumphantly accomplished. The entire province of Dongola has been occupied by the Egyptian troops, and throughout the 500 miles of the Nile valley that have thus been recovered by the Khedive the population, freed from Dervish oppression, is friendly to the Government. In my last letter I dealt briefly with the coming settlement of the reconquered province under a military administration. It is suggested that the Government, as soon as it has settled such claims—many of them conflicting and false—as are being set up by refugees and others to the ownership of the land under cultivation, should encourage the fellahin to emigrate from Lower Egypt to this now depopulated country. The fellahin are a stay-at-home folk, averse to leaving their hereditary farms ; but the prospect of grants of fertile land, of gifts of stock and seed-corn should induce numbers to seek their fortunes in the south. The expense to which the Government will be put in carrying these measures and in introducing scientific irrigation will

be well repaid by the revenue which is certain to accrue within a few years.

But it is of the utmost importance that whatever assistance be in the first instance extended to the existing and incoming population should come from the State alone, and not from private speculators of foreign nationality, of whom many are now awaiting their opportunity. The discontent that led to the Arabi revolt was largely due to the distressed condition of the fellahin peasants, who had mortgaged their land and borrowed money on standing crops at exorbitant rates of interest from usurers and so-called agricultural banks. Distrust and hatred of all Europeans was the natural result. The settlement of the Dongola province, under our supervision, will probably be carried out somewhat after the methods which have been satisfactorily tested by Great Britain in her Eastern possessions. In Kashmir, for example, where the interests of the cultivator are now so carefully safeguarded, he enjoys a perpetuity of tenure under the Maharajah, who is the owner of all the land; every ten years a fresh settlement fixes the annual sum which he has to pay to the Government; he cannot mortgage his hereditary farm or otherwise alienate his rights without the sanction of the Settlement Court. So should it be in Dongola; a just Government should be the peasant's only creditor. At this moment numbers of Levantine, Maltese, Greek, and other speculators are applying for permission to go to Dongola; these, if allowed a free hand, will within

a few years become the owners of all the cultivable land in the province, while the people will be impoverished. If the Government, while effecting the settlement of the province, neglects to protect the ignorant cultivators against the crowds of usurers who hope to find a profitable field for their operations in Dongola, the evils that must ensue will, no doubt, be not altogether unwelcome to those who are jealous of our influence in Egypt; for the burden of the blame will, with justice, be put upon us, and agitators will know how to make use of the occasion to excite an ill feeling against Great Britain throughout Egypt.

As soon as it became known—a few days after the occupation of Dongola and Merawi—that the Egyptian army would make no further advance this year there commenced an exodus of special service officers and correspondents of newspapers. We sold our horses and camels and made arrangements to travel down the Nile by boat to Kosheh. Correspondents were permitted to take passage on the Government sailing-boats, of which many are now employed in transporting supplies from the railway terminus at Kosheh to our southern garrisons. For a few days we had to remain idle in our camp at Sheikh Sheriff, as no empty boats were sailing north; but on September 30 a strong north wind brought up a large fleet of *gayassas*, which were promptly unloaded and despatched back to Kosheh for further cargoes. A big two-masted boat was placed at the disposal of myself and another correspondent; she

was about fifty feet in length and fourteen in breadth, and carried two lateens. Her *reis* and his crew of two very lazy and dirty Berberi youths were from the north and knew but little of this portion of the river. Happily we had with us one of our camel-drivers, an old Arab called Oshee (pronounced like the Irish surname), who was a native of the Dongola province and was able to direct the *reis* in the intricate navigation of the rapids and rock-encumbered channels. We bade farewell to our numerous friends of the Egyptian army with the hope that we should meet again in the near future on the road to Omdurman, and on the evening of September 30 embarked with our servants and an Egyptian soldier, whose easy duty it was to accompany the *gayassa* on her voyages and prevent the indolent crew from lingering too long on the way.

It was an interesting journey, for we frequently landed either on the river bank or on the green islands, and had an excellent opportunity of observing the immediate results of the re-occupation by Egypt of this province. The people had already flocked back to their homes, and were reassured by the presence in their midst of their own sheikhs, who, as I explained in a former letter, had been carried off as hostages by the retreating Dervishes, but had effected their escape on the appearance of our gunboats at Debbeh. These people seemed contented and showed complete confidence in the first Europeans they had seen for many years; wherever we landed the women and children

crowded round us in a friendly manner. It was evident that the inhabitants were pleased to be rid of the Dervish yoke; they had now resumed the cultivation of the land, and wherever the Dervishes had left any oxen to turn the water-wheels we heard the droning of the *sakiyehs* as they raised the water to irrigate the fields.

Though we had a strong stream under us, the voyage to Kosheh, a distance of about 200 miles, occupied nearly six days, and our soldier told us that the boat on her last voyage had taken no less than fifteen days to sail up the river from Kosheh to Dongola, despite the fresh breeze behind her. Slow as was our progress, it would have been slower still had we two Englishmen not been on board to stir up the lazy *reis*, who was of opinion that the proper way to take a boat down the river was to let her drift idly all day and tie her up to the bank each night, so that the crew could enjoy their eight hours' slumber. As at this season of the year the strong north wind generally blows throughout the day to impede a boat's drifting, whereas at night it is calm, we insisted on the old man's continuing his navigation throughout a great portion of the night, except when we were on dangerous portions of the river. The men seldom use their oars on these larger *gayassas*, and guide the clumsy, flat-bottomed craft down stream after the following fashion. If the north breeze blows strong against the current, the head of the vessel is turned up stream, and as the empty boat draws little water and her high prow

exposes a large surface to hold the wind, good steerage way is gained, which enables the *reis* to keep her in the strongest portion of the current and to avoid dangers. The result is that one is often travelling through the water at quite two knots in the direction opposite to that in which one is bound, though at the same time the favouring stream running four knots under the vessel enables one to make progress northward. Sometimes, again, when the wind was light and he required more steerage way in order to dodge the shallows and rocks, over which the river rushed with an ominous roar, the *reis* hoisted his foresail, or, if necessary, both his sails. Occasionally, too, he tacked backwards and forwards across the river; and it was then, I think, that our progress was slowest, for the lee-way made by that *gayassa* was extraordinary, and as she would not "go about" the *reis* had to wear her each time, an operation which involved running fast up stream before the wind for fully five minutes before the clumsy craft, after gybing, would luff up and sail close-hauled again on the other tack. It was a curious and paradoxical style of navigation. The faster we wished to travel the less sail we carried, and we were at our best under bare poles. It was only at the approach of danger that our prudent skipper hoisted all his canvas, and it was only when a clear channel was before him that he boldly furled both his sails and allowed his craft to rush madly down the stream. For thousands of years the indolent Nile mariners have been content with this

leisurely navigation; and yet any carpenter could, in an hour or so, by fitting leeboards on one of these craft, enable her to accomplish the downward voyage in less than half the time now occupied—a matter perhaps worthy of consideration on the part of the Government, as sailing-boats will for some time be employed for the transport of military supplies on this portion of the river. Between Debbeh and Kosheh the river is generally broad and unobstructed by rocks or shoals at high Nile, so that a vessel can tack down boldly between bank and bank; it is only at the cataracts that caution has to be observed.

But, despite the slowness of it, our voyage was a pleasant one. After our long marches across the dreary deserts it was pleasant to get away from the dust-storm and the fiery heat and float lazily down the broad stream. The country on either side looked wonderfully green and fertile to us; for from the water we could not see the barren sands that stretched beyond the narrow belts of cultivation. We drifted between palm-groves, pastures, and fields of tall maize, past many villages and groaning water-wheels; and it was difficult for us to realize that the fair shore was but a thin mask in front of the world's most hopeless and hideous wildernesses. Now we were winding through archipelagoes of verdant islands and now descending long reaches two miles in breadth, where our vessel tossed on the muddy waves raised by the conflicting wind and tide. On October 1 we skirted the island of

Argo, which is about twenty-five miles long and eight miles broad. The soil here is exceedingly fertile, and the land is all under cultivation, save in the centre of the island, where extends a desert track occupied by nomad Arabs. The King of Argo, it will be remembered, eluded the Dervishes, who would have carried him off, and came in to us at Hafir. We landed at several villages on this island in order to purchase fowls, which the inhabitants, though well disposed to us, were unwilling to sell, as they have little use for money. As far as we could see inland stretched the fields of maize and beans and the pastures on which herds of fine cattle were grazing. Here the people seemed to be more prosperous than those we met in other portions of the province, and apparently have not been despoiled of their property by the Dervishes. Here too we saw some large *gayassas* in course of construction on the shore; for Argo is famous throughout the Sudan as a great shipbuilding centre. The Mahdi's family came from this neighbourhood, and his relations were known as expert boat-builders. The timbers and knees of these boats are of the hard wood of the native acacia, while the masts and planking are of imported Norwegian pine; how this has been procured since the Mahdists closed the Sudan to trade it is difficult to say. At the northern end of Argo we saw a large village whose inhabitants are of fairer complexion than the natives of the country, and on inquiry we were told that Ismail Pasha

had here established a colony of old Egyptian soldiers.

There were plenty of sailing-craft on the river; some downward bound, performing the same clumsy evolutions as our own, a few of them crowded with Dervish prisoners, still clad in the Mahdist patched *gibbehs* and turbans, on their way to Halfa; others upward bound, deeply laden with supplies for our troops, rushing through the water under their great lateens, the two-masted boats with their sails "goose-winged," one set on either side. On October 2 we passed Hafir and the scene of our naval engagement, and further on saw our luckless gunboat, the *El Teb*, listing over at a considerable angle as she still lay on the rocks which had pierced her thin sides. Then we shot the Hannek, or third cataract of the Nile, at this season a long series of rapids, through which we threaded our devious way between innumerable rocks and whirlpools. We were more fortunate than two other correspondents who had preceded us, and who, as we afterwards learnt, had capsized here, lost their kits, and drifted several hours down the rapids, holding on to the bottom of the overturned and often submerged boat. They at last reached the shore and were rendered every possible assistance by the British officers at Fereig.

It was now, amid these really dangerous rapids, where a slight error of judgment would have brought instant shipwreck and probable loss of life, that our old *reis* showed that he really knew his work after

all. His lazy expression vanished; his eye keenly scanned the broken water round him as he firmly held the tiller and shouted his orders as to the handling of the sails to the two lads. Generally with the head of his vessel pointing up stream and foresail set to give him good steerage way, he cleverly guided the boat, so that, well in hand, she slowly drifted, stern foremost, between the numerous dangers, rocks always close to him on either side, and angry whirlpools ever and anon rising at his bows as if with intent to throw the *gayassa* off her course and dash her on the treacherous needles of rock that lay in wait beneath the foaming water. Sometimes he sailed across the river to seek the safest channel through a rocky reef; having found it, he placed his boat in mid entrance of it, and then, having done all that lay in his power, he loudly invoked the assistance of Allah, and left her to be swept helplessly down the boiling rapid, escaping destruction by but a few yards on either hand. Sometimes when he perceived no serious difficulties ahead he triced up his sail to allow the boat to drift the faster; on the other hand, when approaching an exceptionally dangerous bit of water he carried mainsail as well as foresail, so that the vessel remained practically stationary, the wind pressure just counteracting the influence of the current, and he was thus enabled to scan the broken water below him at leisure, select his road, and form his plan of action. It was what a sailor would have called pretty work, and the old *reis* rose in my estimation;

for though, when in safe reaches of the river, lazy, awkward in the handling of his boat, frequently running into the bank or grounding on a shoal through sheer carelessness, he was always, when put on his mettle by the perils of a cataract, the able skipper, prompt in action, possessing unerring judgment and iron nerve. When descending a cataract it is, of course, always well to have a contrary wind, as was the case this day. When a south wind combines with the torrent to drive a vessel through these rock-sown rapids, the most skilful *reis* can have but little control over her course, and it must be by good luck chiefly that disaster is avoided.

Having safely effected the passage of the third cataract, we brought up alongside a village in order to purchase goats or fowls, but found it impossible to do so. The people told us that the Dervishes had carried off all food supplies some weeks before, with the intention of leaving the country desolate before our advance. It was only to the south of Hafir that we were able to obtain provisions from the villagers, for our advance from that point had been so rapid and unexpected that the Dervishes had no time to raid before taking to flight. In the evening we came to the ruins of what had apparently been an old Roman fort crowning a height on the left bank just below a village called Jougal. Here the channel of the river is much narrowed, being hemmed in by rocky bluffs. The Nile, pouring through this defile, is dashed into a wild confusion of breakers, whirlpools, and shifting eddies. It was

an extraordinary and ever-changing spectacle. The water boiled and roared around us as in a violent tide-race at sea. In the midst of a still piece of water a whirlpool would suddenly form; gyrating with ever-increasing velocity it would yawn wider and wider, as if preparing to swallow up our vessel, and then disappear as suddenly as it had arisen. Next a streak of foaming water would shoot hissing athwart the channel, as if it were some javelin hurled at us by the angry river spirit, strike our vessel on bow or stern, and whirl her round like a teetotum. Near the banks the water was almost still, but we found it impossible to creep up along them and so pass the central eddies, for a strong undertow always sucked us out into the vortex. In this strange place we remained for quite an hour without making any progress, buffeted by the steep waves and the whirlpools, often revolving dizzily, while round and round us ever seemed to spin the ruined Roman castle on the hill. Sometimes we contrived to steal down to the lower end of the race, but then, even as if the genii of the whirlpool were playing with their captives, up would spring some sudden malicious countercurrent to sweep us back again to our former position. It was just such an enchanted piece of water as one reads of in the old fairy tales, from which the hapless mariner can never effect his escape once his vessel has been drawn within the magic circle. Our man, Oshee, who knew these narrows well, told us that boats were sometimes kept tossing about here for three

days before they could get through. Happily the passage is attended with little danger, as at high Nile the rocks in this channel are all at a considerable depth below the surface.

Early in the morning of October 3 we passed Fereig, where a small garrison is now stationed. Then we went down the Kaibar cataract, which presents no real difficulties, and in the evening we came to Absarat, where a permanent garrison will now be maintained. Here we found Girouard and Pritchard, two of that small band of young Engineer officers whose work has contributed so largely to the success of the Dongola expedition; they were engaged in making a survey for the railway, which is to be now extended with rapidity from Kosheh southwards. On October 4 we passed our once busy post, Suarda, now abandoned, as it is no longer on the line of communication, and then reached the large village of Kub el Selim, on the west bank of the Nile, a remarkably thriving-looking settlement for this region, surrounded by great groves of carefully tended date-palms. This was the country of our old Arab camelman, Oshee, who for hours, as we slowly drifted down the river, had been recognizing friends on the bank and exchanging loud greetings with them. He was to leave our service here, so we put him on shore; he was a friendly old person and insisted on taking my companion and myself to see his house. This we came to after a pleasant walk through the palm groves, and then we for the first time realized that our camel-driver

was a man of considerable importance when at home. He possessed a spacious and comfortable house of several chambers, wherein dwelt his wife and children. He had a second wife at some place further north, and now contemplated, despite his years, the investment of a portion of his savings in the purchase of yet a third and younger wife, for whom he intended to set up another establishment near Dongola. He would thus never be far removed from some home and family during his wanderings up and down the Nile. We discovered that Oshee was a member of the most important family in the neighbourhood, and that his brother was the sheikh of the village. The rest of the population were of the degraded Berberi race, despised by the more manly Arabs. Oshee, hospitable as behoved an Arab, regaled us with coffee, cakes, and excellent dates from his own palm groves, and gave us a fat sheep to take on board with us. In his house we saw large stores of dates, and he told us that the dates of Kub el Selim were greatly esteemed throughout the Sudan, and fetched a high price. The Dervishes had not despoiled Oshee and his brother the sheikh of their cattle, dates, and grain, though, before our occupation of Suarda, this was a Dervish post under the command of Hassan Wad el Nejumi, the chief Emir of the Jaalin, who surrendered to us at Dongola. Possibly Oshee and his relations, Arabs dwelling in the midst of these Berberi peasants, prudently conciliated the Mahdists, and as head men of the village were enabled to

render valuable services to the Khalifa. However that may be, they are now delighted to be rid of their dangerous Baggara visitors, who, by the way, were shelled out of this village by our guns on the east bank on the morning of our occupation of Suarda.

On October 5 we arrived at Kosheh, and then commenced our tedious journey to Cairo. The train took us in fourteen hours to Wady Halfa. There we embarked on a steamer on the afternoon of the 7th with a dozen special service officers, homeward-bound like ourselves, and the men of the Royal Engineers. In twenty-four hours we reached Shellal, whence the six-mile-long railway took us to Assuan. Here we have to wait till the morning of the 11th for one of Messrs. Cook's steamers, which will carry us to the present southern terminus of the Egyptian railway system at Nag Hamadi in about twenty-eight hours. Thence the train should take us in twelve hours to Cairo, which we shall reach on the morning of October 13. The Sirdar and his staff, who are on their way from Dongola, will overtake us and arrive at Cairo at the same time.

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INDEX.

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